

# Office of the Child Advocate



## *At a Glance*

**JEANNE MILSTEIN, Child Advocate (through 2/29/12)**

**Mickey Kramer, Associate Child Advocate (Acting Child Advocate effective 3/1/2012)**

**Established - 1995**

**Statutory authority – CGS §46a-13k, et seq.**

**Central office - 999 Asylum Avenue, Hartford, CT 06105**

**Number of employees - 6**

**Recurring operating expenses - \$675,237**

*Through P.A. 11-48, the Office of the Child Advocate (OCA) was consolidated for administrative purposes with several other government watchdog agencies into the Office of Governmental Accountability (OGA). Designated as a division of the newly created OGA, the OCA maintains its independence and statutory authority/responsibilities.*

## **Mission**

*The Office of the Child Advocate (OCA) speaks for Connecticut's children. The OCA was created in 1995 to be an independent voice for children rather than an administrator of programs. OCA's mission is to oversee the care and protection of Connecticut's children and to advocate for their well-being. OCA is committed to ensuring that all children receive the care and supports that they need.*

## **Statutory Responsibility**

The statutory responsibilities include: evaluating the procedures for and the delivery of state-funded services to children, investigating inquiries or complaints regarding children, recommending changes in state policy, conducting programs of public education, legislative advocacy and proposing systemic reform, reviewing conditions and procedures of all public and

private facilities where children are placed, providing training and technical assistance to children's attorneys, initiating or intervening in court cases on behalf of children, serving on the Child Fatality Review Panel and conducting a fatality review on the circumstances of the death of a child due to unexpected or unexplained causes in order to facilitate development of prevention strategies to address identified trends and patterns of risk and to improve coordination of services for children and families in the state.

### **Public Service**

OCA continues to bring about significant change for Connecticut children, youth and families. OCA helps children/youth, families, community members, health, human service and education providers and others by educating and informing them about services and supports available, coaching them through various public systems, reviewing individual cases, advocating for children at risk and addressing broad public policy issues impacting the well-being of children. Specific reviews and investigations assist the OCA in identifying systemic issues and serve as a catalyst for setting internal priorities, and help focus policy and legislative change initiatives.

### **Achievements/Improvements 2011-12**

- Actively participated on the recently appointed Department of Children and Families (DCF) Commissioner's transition team which Commissioner Katz convened to assist her in identifying priorities and recommending strategies to address myriad challenges within the State's consolidated prevention, child welfare, children's mental health, and juvenile justice agency. DCF has subsequently developed a sweeping reforms initiative. OCA will continue to monitor and provide feedback on implementation.
- Actively participated on the DCF Riverview Hospital Implementation Team, a multi-stakeholder team convened by Commissioner Katz to assist her in identifying areas of concern and capacity and to advise regarding necessary reforms for the state's beleaguered psychiatric hospital and companion treatment center for children and youth. OCA has continued to vigilantly monitor the conditions of care and quality of treatment within the facility and meets regularly with DCF executive administration regarding findings and recommendations.
- Continued monitoring and advocacy on behalf of youth incarcerated in Connecticut adult prisons. OCA meets regularly with facility wardens and correctional staff and the Department of Correction (DOC) Commissioner to reform policies and practices within the DOC to reflect understanding of the unique needs of adolescents within that system. OCA actively participated on the legislative task force (JJPOCC Juvenile Justice Policy and Operating Coordinating Council) reconvened this past year to assess preparedness and address the needs related to the impending (July 1, 2012) inclusion of 17 year olds in the juvenile justice system.
- Regular monitoring of the transition of youth from DCF to the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS), and advocacy to promote optimal health and success in transition. OCA continues to monitor the well-being of many young adults who have been transitioned to the adult service system and meets regularly with DMHAS Young Adult Services administration regarding both home and community based support needs of this young adult population as well as the conditions of care and quality of

treatment within Connecticut Valley Hospital, the state's psychiatric hospital for adults with serious chronic and persistent mental health needs.

- Initiated an investigation into the alleged inappropriate use of seclusion in the Middletown Public Schools. OCA joined with the State of Connecticut Office of Protection and Advocacy for Persons with Disabilities (OPA) to conduct a thorough review of practice within this local education agency (LEA) as well as the role and responsibilities of state regulatory agencies. We expect the investigation to be concluded within the next few months. OCA offered legislative testimony on the harmful impact of seclusion on children and looks forward to participation in legislative activities planned for the upcoming fiscal year to further discuss the use of restrictive measures within Connecticut public schools.
- OCA and the Child Fatality Review Panel released a first ever 10 year review of child deaths in Connecticut. The report is being widely disseminated, both within Connecticut and the national child death review organizations, and serves as a catalyst for policy and practice discussions focused on child safety and mortality prevention.
- Actively participating on the legislative RBA Children's Report Card workgroup.
- OCA continues to work with other advocates and providers to identify gaps in service and improve timely access to critically needed mental health services for children who are uninsured or privately insured.
- Actively participating on the OPM initiated Autism Feasibility workgroup. Children on the autism spectrum present with extremely variable and complex service and support needs, which if unmet, can result in devastating effect on their families and place them at risk of out of home care. OCA receives frequent calls from families and providers to assist them in accessing critically needed services for children which too often are unavailable or tremendously difficult to access across multiple state agencies.
- OCA leadership meets regularly with the OGA Executive Administrator and all the other OGA division leaders to maximize administrative efficiency and address the challenges of such significant consolidation. While challenges remain, OCA has experienced the positive support of the OGA IT professionals as well as HR and fiscal.

### **Information Reported as Required by State Statute**

OCA priorities for the next fiscal year\*:

- Continued vigilant oversight of children in state care and custody and advocacy to ensure that actual conditions of care and quality of treatment are 1) appreciated by agency executive leadership and 2) reflect a more sophisticated understanding of the needs of recipient children and their families.
- Continued leadership in reducing restrictive and punitive measures, including but not limited to, restraint, seclusion, exclusion and arrest, in all child serving programs and settings.
- Continued leadership to ensure that transition from child serving systems to young adult serving systems is individualized and smooth.
- Continued work with adult serving systems to ensure that the services and supports available and offered to older adolescents and young adults transitioning from child serving systems are age and developmentally appropriate.

\*Subject to revision with the appointment of a new Child Advocate. OCA expects that the Child Advocate position will be filled by early fall 2012. While no doubt the capacity of the office has been impacted by the loss of >25% of our workforce over the past year, the current 5 member staff continue to exhibit extraordinary commitment to ensuring that the responsibilities of the OCA are effectively met.