

Office of the Child Advocate

At a Glance

MICKEY KRAMER, Acting Child Advocate 7/1/2012-11/1/2012

Jamey Bell, Child Advocate 11/2/2012-6/30/13

Deputy Head - Mickey Kramer, Associate Child Advocate

Established - 1995

Statutory authority - C.G.S.§46a-13K, et seq.

Central office - 999 Asylum Avenue, Hartford, CT 06105

Number of employees - 6

**Recurring operating expenses -
\$657,625**

Administration: 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). As a division of the OGA, the OCA maintains its statutory independence.

Mission

The office was created in 1995 to be an independent voice for children. OCA speaks for Connecticut's children to ensure their care and protection and to advocate for their well-being. OCA is committed to ensuring that all children receive the care and supports that they need.

Statutory Responsibilities

The statutory responsibilities include: evaluating the procedures for and the delivery of state-funded services to children, investigating inquiries or complaints about services for 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 shine the light on the needs and circumstances of children in Connecticut, and works to bring about necessary change for children and families. OCA helps children/youth, families, community members, health, human service and education professionals 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 to focus policy and legislative change initiatives.

OCA Achievements/Improvements for Fiscal Year

- OCA Activities: Continued active participation on the CT Family Support Council. This year, OCA assumed a leadership role on a subcommittee of the FSC developed to focus specifically on school climate and the implications for children with disabilities.
- In collaboration with the OHA, NAMI CT, and the CT Health Foundation, OCA commemorated National Children's Mental Health Awareness Month in May with a public awareness event held at the State Capitol, "*Hold Up Your Hand*" to fight discrimination and stigma of people living with mental illness.
- Facilitated multi-stakeholder problem-solving discussion regarding the increased numbers of children presenting in hospital emergency rooms with acute mental health needs. OCA will continue to take a leadership role in advocating for an expanded continuum of mental health resources for all of CT's children. OCA has been named a statutory member of the mental health task force created through P.A. 13-3, section 66.
- Actively participated on the state's Autism Feasibility Study workgroup, created pursuant to P.A. 11-6 and serves on the Autism Spectrum Disorder service implementation subcommittee. The workgroup, comprised of consumers, advocates, representatives from the public and private sector and academics, submitted a report to the legislature in January 2013 recommending the development of a multi-year coordinated plan to expand and improve the existing ASD service system in CT. Subcommittees continue to meet.
- OCA and OHA were awarded an \$85,000 grant from the CT Health Foundation to evaluate the CT Behavioral Health Partnership *Pay for Performance* initiative for the purpose of determining potential implications for the commercially insured.
- Active participation on the CT Interagency Restraint and Seclusion Prevention Initiative. OCA is co-sponsoring a statewide educational forum in September 2013 to be held at CCSU on the topic with confirmed participation of national experts, consumers and others.
- Collaborated with the Center for Children's Advocacy, CT Voices for Children, and the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities initiative in sponsoring an educational event focused on the needs of older youth in foster care.
- Through our ombudsman activities, OCA continued to respond to approximately 400* citizen concerns about the provision of state funded services to children. Approximately 15%+ of calls resulted in the need for OCA to investigate pursuant to 46a-13l. (*As reported several times over the past several years, OCA has struggled with an ineffective and outdated data management system. OCA looks forward to FY 2013-2014 as we are finalizing plans for a more capable data software system that will enable more thorough

and accurate data reporting.)

- Participated in many statewide working groups and task forces related to children's issues.
- Child Fatality Review: Child Fatality Review Panel: Continued to co-chair the CT Child Fatality Review Panel (CFRP). CFRP reviewed the unexpected/untimely deaths of 165 children and youth during FY 2012-2013 (62 Natural, 33 Accidents, 30 Homicides (including 20 children at the Sandy Hook Elementary School), 16 Undetermined, 10 Suicides, and 14 cases remain pending further studies with the Chief Medical Examiner. The OCA also review over 250 critical incidents reported to DCF involving children. Advocated for all statutory appointments to the CFRP be made.
- Initiated an independent review of the December 2012 Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting deaths of 20 children and 6 adults. In accordance with 46a-131 (11)(c) , the OCA/CFRP will focus on the "mechanism" of death, the shooter, in an effort to facilitate development of prevention strategies and coordination of services for children and families in the state.
- Published a report: "12 Years of Child Gun Deaths and Injuries in Connecticut, January 2013".
- Legislative initiatives included testifying before the Legislature's Gun Violence Working Group and the Mental Health Services Working Group which were established after the tragic deaths at the Sandy Hook Elementary School in December 2012. In addition, the OCA testified before the Select Committee on Children, the Appropriations Committee, the Judiciary Committee, the Human Services Committee, the Education Committee, and the Public Health Committee on a variety of proposed bills concerning services to children. Testimony was given on the Birth-to-Three program, the Governor's Budget Proposal for the FY14 and FY 15 Biennium, the juvenile justicesystem, mandated reporting, preK-grade 12 education, and the health insurance grievance process. Of the 15 bills where testimony was offered, 2 passed and became law (SB 887 – AAC the Care 4 Kids Program and SB 972 – AAC the Mental, Emotional and Behavioral Health for Youths).
- State Department of Education: Completed an investigative report in partnership with the Office of Protection and Advocacy for Persons with Disabilities: *No More "Scream Rooms" in Connecticut Schools: An Investigation into Seclusion Practices at Farm Hill Elementary School*, including *Analysis of the Responses of the State Departments of Education and Children and Families* and *Recommendations for Reform*. OCA/OPA look forward to continued work with SDE and DCF on implementation of the recommendations in the upcoming year. The report is available on the OCA and OPA websites.
- Alerted the public to the problem of widespread school suspensions for elementary age children. OCA will continue discussions with the SDE and other stakeholders regarding the development of an appropriate response to the needs of young children exhibiting behaviors indicative of distress.
- Department of Children and Families: Continued active participation on the DCF Continuum of Care Partnership convened by Commissioner Katz to assist the DCF administration in moving forward with major change initiatives to improve policy and practice across the agency's responsibilities for child protection, mental health, juvenile justice and prevention. In addition, OCA has had regular, independent meetings throughout the year with the DCF executive team to provide feedback on progress

towards desired changes.

- Ongoing active monitoring of the care and treatment of children at the Solnit Center South, (formerly Riverview Hospital) due to persistent concerns about the conditions of the environment, overreliance on restrictive measures, and quality of treatment provided to some of the state's most vulnerable children. OCA continues to meet frequently with facility and agency leadership to discuss findings and recommendations for improvement. The current DCF administration has responded favorably, and is attempting significant programmatic changes including increased executive oversight and support of the struggling facility.
- Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services: Continued monitoring and oversight of the conditions of care and treatment for youth who have transitioned from DCF care and services to the DMHAS young adult service system. This work has included examination of the young adult inpatient unit at CT Valley Hospital, as well as DMHAS' Whiting Forensic. Concerns identified have been shared regularly with both facility and agency leadership and resulted in an improvement plan. OCA also continues monitoring of the well-being of youth with serious and persistent mental health issues supported in DMHAS funded programs. Youth specific and systemic advocacy for developmentally appropriate supports and services for this population is ongoing.
- Department of Corrections: Continued monitoring and oversight of the conditions of confinement and treatment of incarcerated youth in the state's adult prisons. OCA continues to work collaboratively with DOC leadership to remedy issues related to correctional practices inappropriate to the adolescent and young adult population. Activities are currently underway, co-led by OCA, to revise a number of important DOC policies to reflect the special needs of adolescents.