

# Child Advocacy Center – Multidisciplinary Team Advisory Board

Nydia Monagas, Chair  
John Esmerado, Vice-Chair

**April 9, 2021**  
**1:30 p.m. – 3:30 P.M.**  
**Virtual Meeting**

## Minutes

### **In Attendance:**

Christine Beyer  
John Esmerado  
Martin Finkel  
Gladibel Medina  
Nydia Monagas  
Debbie Riveros  
Elahna Strom Weinflash

NJ Department of Children and Families  
Attorney  
CARES Institute  
Dorothy B. Hersh Child Protection Center  
New Jersey Children’s Alliance  
Monmouth County Prosecutor’s Office  
Office of the Law Guardian

### **Guests:**

Joseph Pargola  
Pete Boser

NJ Department of Children and Families  
New Jersey Children’s Alliance

### **Staff:**

Daniel Yale

NJ Department of Children and Families

## **I. Welcome and Introductions**

The meeting was called to order and the Open Public Meetings notice was read.

## **II. Approval of Minutes**

The Board reviewed the minutes from the February 5, 2021 meeting. The Board voted to approve the minutes without edit.

## **III. New Business**

### **Review and vote on completed Annual Progress Reviews (APRs)**

Dr. Finkel informed the Board that he felt that the APRs are missing information to be able to identify trends in individual counties. Dr. Finkel felt that the APRs are only a point in time for that year and it would be helpful to know if there are trends in case referred, cases reviewed, etc. and how much progress is being made. Nydia stated that the data included in these reports was from 2020 but they do have data from previous years that could also be included. John stated that data from the past few years may not be helpful as each county identifies cases differently. John stated that once the Data Subgroup is able to hire a consultant to review data, identify the definition of a case and gain buy-in from the counties on a universal definition of a case, the data that Dr. Finkel is requesting will be much more useful.

### **Atlantic County**

Dr. Finkel stated that he noticed a discrepancy between the number of children served by the MDT and the number of new cases reviewed by the MDT. Dr. Finkel also stated that the number of children referred for medical evaluation was left blank. Pete Boser explained law enforcement in Atlantic County

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are being made aware of and counting every referral that is made by DCP, but they are not necessarily investigating all of the cases and not all cases are being reviewed by the MDT. Pete also explained that they also count interviews of any type, not just forensic interviews. Pete stated, as John previously mentioned, if there isn't a consistent definition of a case or consistent data tracking, the data will only be meaningful to those that are reporting, at best.

Dr. Finkel asked, without a clear set of expectations from the previous review, how does the Board measure whether each of the counties has met their objectives for the new year. John stated that the National Children's Alliance (NCA) standards are very general and practice based. NJCA recommends the best practice of the NCA, however, there is no enforcement mechanism. MDT guidelines have been published and distributed in the past. At this point, it is a delicate matter and not feasible to dictate or mandate how the counties operate. The best option at this point is to promote best practice. Once terms are defined, it will be much easier to move everyone in the same direction. Nydia also explained that Atlantic County is in the process of building their facility and has made progress. NJCA measures progress based on what goals the county set the previous year.

Pete informed that Board that the walls have been constructed at the new location and wiring is in place. Atlantic County also developed a goal to revise their protocols and revise their operation once they move to their new location.

Debbie Riveros made a motion to approve Atlantic County. John Esmerado seconded the motion. The Board voted to approve Atlantic County for future funding.

## **Bergen County**

John noted that Bergen County is the largest county in the state with a population of over 1 million people, yet they only had 91 children in their MDT system. John asked if this number was accurate. Pete stated that DCP staff have noted in the past that different areas of the county handle things differently. Pete stated these types of cases may be underreported or that the reports are not being responded to in a consistent manner. Dr. Finkel asked why there was a discrepancy between the number of MDT reviews and the number of new children served. Pete explained that this could occur because there were siblings involved or because a case may be a CAC case but not meet the criteria for a MDT review. Nydia informed the Board that NJCA has also begun to collect data from the Regional Diagnostic Treatment Centers (RDTCs) to be able to compare the CAC data on medical referrals.

John Esmerado made a motion to approve Bergen County. Dr. Medina seconded the motion. The Board voted to approve Bergen County for future funding.

## **Burlington County**

Nydia asked the Board if there were any comments or questions about Burlington County's data, progress, or future areas of development. Pete stated that the CAC Coordinator in Burlington County does not have accurate data on the number of children received mental health services. The Coordinator is confident that every child that received a referral to the RDTC attended their appointment, but as they only monitor cases for a certain amount of time, they are not able to track whether children are receiving mental health services.

Christine Beyer made a motion to approve Burlington County. Dr. Medina seconded the motion. The Board voted to approve Burlington County for future funding.

## **Camden County**

Nydia asked the Board if there was any discussion about the review for Camden County. Hearing no discussion, Debbie Riveros made a motion to approve on Camden County. Christine Beyer seconded the motion. The Board voted to approve Camden County for future funding.

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## **Hunterdon County**

Nydia asked the Board if there was any discussion about the review for Hunterdon County. John noted that Hunterdon County is one of the smallest counties in the state regarding population which would explain why their numbers are low. A question was raised regarding why the number of children served was less than the number of cases reviewed. Pete stated that in Hunterdon County expanded and now reviews child abuse cases as well as sexual abuse cases of all ages. Although these numbers should not be included in this data, it is occasionally included.

John Esmerado made a motion to approve Hunterdon County. Debbie seconded the motion. The Board voted to approve Hunterdon County for future funding.

## **Middlesex County**

Dr. Finkel noted that the review showed a discrepancy between the number of medical evaluations reported by the CAC and the number of evaluations reported by the RDTC. Dr. Medina explained that this is because they complete a report for every child even if it is the same family. Dr. Medina also stated that Middlesex County refers to the RDTC for all of their medical and mental health evaluations. The numbers also include cases that may not be reviewed by the MDT.

Dr. Finkel made a motion to approve Middlesex County. John Esmerado seconded the motion. The Board voted to approve Middlesex County for future funding.

## **Monmouth County**

Dr. Finkel noted that there was a large discrepancy between the number of children referred for medical evaluations and the number of children that actually attended. Debbie explained that the numbers were related to COVID-19 as a lot of parents didn't attend the evaluation or rescheduled the appointment which brought the appointment into the new year. Nydia informed the Board that Monmouth County's goals for the next year are improving data collection and helping families to see the value of the medical evaluation. Christine Beyer made a motion to approve Monmouth County. Elahna Weinflash seconded the motion. The Board voted to approve Monmouth County for future funding. Debbie Riveros abstained from the vote.

## **Somerset County**

Nydia informed the Board that Somerset County has hired a CAC manager and is applying for accreditation with the NCA. John stated that Somerset County has made great progress in the past few years.

Elahna Weinflash made a motion to approve Somerset County. Dr. Medina seconded the motion. The Board voted to approve Somerset County for future funding.

## **Union County**

Nydia explained that Union County only reviews cases when there is a criminal charge. This causes a discrepancy in the number of MDT cases versus CAC cases. Nydia asked the Board if there was any discussion about Union County. Hearing no discussion, Christine Beyer made a motion to approve Union County. Dr. Medina seconded the motion. The Board voted to approve Union County for future funding.

## **Warren County**

Nydia asked if there was any discussion on the Warren County review. Hearing no discussion, John Esmerado made a motion to approve Warren County. Debbie Riveros seconded the motion. The Board voted to approve Warren County for future funding.

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## **FY22 Funding Update**

Nydia informed the Board that CACs are included in the Governor's FY22 budget for \$2 million. NJCA is advocating for additional funding through the Legislature and will keep the Board posted on the progress going forward.

## **Discussion on future RFP funding**

Nydia explained that she is involved in discussions with DCF to explore options on the process regarding how funding is distributed to the counties.

## **Data Workgroup Update**

John informed the Board that the workgroup has all of the stakeholders identified, the known universe of data identified and they are directing the independent consultant to the data sets, to the stakeholders and encouraging consultation with the MDT Coordinators. John stated that the data that will be analyzed is data from DCF, the Administrative Office of the Courts, RDTCs, the MDTs, and the Attorney General's Office. John felt that they will get a very good product out of this initiative as it will be very comprehensive. The RFP for a PhD level individual with a social work or epidemiology background will go out to the listserv of NJCA and Nydia is in discussions with various schools of social work. John stated that he believes they identified the problem and really isolated where the greatest disconnects are located. John expects to have a full report by Labor Day that will assist in making some progress on the issue of what a case is, how everyone should define a case, and why it is important.

## **Discussion: Increasing Referrals for Medical Referrals**

Nydia stated that this issue has been brought up consistently during meetings and wanted to give the Board an opportunity to speak about it further. Nydia spoke about the possibility of creating a video for families around the medical evaluation. Nydia also reached out to DCF to present a webinar for DCF staff around medical evaluations. Dr. Finkel informed the Board that he emailed the members the data from the CARES Institute. Dr. Finkel noted that there is a substantial decrease in the number of referrals from 2018 to what is projected for 2021. Dr. Medina stated that Dorothy B. Hersch was also experiencing a decline, but that the numbers were beginning to increase. Commissioner Beyer informed the Board that referrals to DCF are up 4% from March 2020. Commissioner Beyer also informed the Board that there is still a decrease in call volume from schools, but the number of parents calling to receive services has increased. Sexual abuse referrals to DCF were down by approximately one third over the previous four weeks as compared to last year. Commissioner Beyer stated that further exploration into the data would have to be done in order to gain some understanding of why there is a decrease in sexual abuse referrals.

## **IV. Announcements**

Dr. Finkel announced that the CARES Institute will be holding their annual symposium on April 22, 2021. It will be a full day, virtual event with national speakers presenting on sustainability and complex trauma.

## **V. Adjourn**

John Esmerado made a motion to adjourn. Dr. Medina seconded the motion. Meeting adjourned.

Next meeting Friday, June 4, 2021.