

Citizen Review Board Act: An Overview in 10 Slides

A graphic featuring two large hands, one on the left and one on the right, holding a silhouette of a family (two adults and two children) in the center. The hands and family are dark blue, set against a lighter blue oval background. The entire graphic is centered on a solid blue background.

Montana's Proven Solution

History of Montana's Citizen Review Board Act & Pilot Project in 5 Cities Statewide for 8 years: 12/1994-4/2003

1993- Senator Judy Jacobson introduced a bill establishing the Local Citizen Review Board for foster care placement. ([Note 2](#))

1994- The pilot started in Missoula.(December). ([Note 2](#))

1996- Pilot expanded to Butte and Bozeman. ([Note 2](#))

1997- Volunteers in all three districts donated 1,455 hours in review and advocacy. ([Note 4](#))

1998- Helena joined the pilot. ([Note 5](#))

1999- Great Falls to become the fifth and final site under the pilot in 2000. ([Note 5](#))

2001- Legislature expanded pilot program to statewide and permanent. ([Note 5](#))

2003- The legislature did not fund the statewide expansion of the CRBs because of a projected \$2m shortfall in the State's administrative and fiscal assumption of the Judiciary. (Note 8)

What is the Citizen Review Board?

The Citizen Review Board (CRB) is “a committee of volunteers who are appointed by local district judges to review the permanency plans prepared by the Department of Public Health and Human Services for all children placed in out-of-home care.” ([Note 1](#))

The Board reviews the case and makes recommendations to the Department of Public Health and Human Services. These recommendations are based on the board’s findings with the goal “of ensuring that the best interests of children in out-of-home care are being met and that each child has an appropriate permanency plan.” ([Note 1](#))

The CRB reviews hold DPHHS accountable through direct citizen oversight. ([Note 4](#))

What's the Difference?

CRBs v. Foster Care Review Committee

The CRB is made of volunteers who are appointed by a district judge. They receive at minimum, 24 hours of training, and continue to get training after being appointed. The board is completely independent from the DPPHS in its review and appointment. The CRB is able to make recommendations for placement, treatment, family time, post-termination issues, etc. If the DPPHS disagrees with the recommendations of the CRB, it must make its argument in writing, and if the CRB and the DPPHS can't come to a satisfactory resolution, the Court is asked to decide.

A Foster Care Review Committee is chosen by the DPPHS. All of the review sessions are administered by the DPPHS. The review committee can make suggestions, however, if the DPPHS decides that the improvements aren't what it wants to do, it doesn't need to offer an explanation to anyone.

CRBs are Better at Reducing Burdens

CRBs reduce the burden on children from the trauma associated with removal and multiple placements.

Citizen Review Boards cut down on how long a child is out of their home, achieve permanency more quickly for those who can't go home, and reduce the amount of trauma on children by reducing the amount of placements. "In comparing the statistics of children who only had one entry into the system with statistics from two years ago [2000], we find a 3.2% increase, which indicated that children are achieving permanency with fewer placements." ([Note 7](#))

CRBs save the courts time and money. CRBs reduce the burden on judges.

A Citizen Review Board is made of regular citizens, appointed by the courts, who have an interest in bettering the Foster Care System. They are unpaid members of their communities, putting in thousands of hours to give relief to a underequipped system.

A CRB Aids the Judiciary because CRBs Have Teeth!

CRB volunteers are not in their role at the request of the DPHHS, and their independence and self-selection guarantees a higher level of engagement in getting kids back home safely, as quickly as is safely possible.

CRB volunteers also have the statutory authority to have their recommendations followed by the DPHHS.

If the DPHHS disagrees with the recommendations of a CRB, it must state its reasoning in writing. If the CRB and the CRB still disagree, the DPHHS must file a motion to be heard in the district court.

How Does a CRB Work?

Each board consists of three to five unpaid volunteers, appointed by local district judges, meeting at least quarterly, or as needed by case. ([Note 1](#)) Prior to serving on the committee each member must complete 24 hours of training. They are also given a training manual that includes applicable laws and procedure to do their job. ([Note 2](#)) They continue receive ongoing training in review procedures and placement issues. ([Note 3](#)) The goal is to keep the same CRB reviewing a child's case. They will stay with the case as long as the child is in foster care.

How does it work? Continued

The CRB review focuses on “1) if reasonable efforts were made to return the child home; 2) appropriateness of the placement; 3) adherence with the case plan; 4) projection date for reunification or placement for adoption or legal guardianship; 5) other problems, solutions, or alternatives that the board determines should be explored. ([Note 2](#))

Review results are forwarded to the DPHHS, and it must implement the recommendations made by the Citizens Review Board. If they can not be implemented, the DPHHS must explain why in writing. If the CRB does not modify its recommendation, the DPHHS may move for court intervention. ([Note 3](#))

Accomplishments

The average time a child was under a Temporary Investigative Authority Order was 11 months in 1995, and was reduced to 4 months in 1997. ([Note 4](#))

The average time a child was under a Temporary Legal Custody Order was 16 months in 1995, and was reduced to 5 months in 1997. ([Note 4](#))

2000= 83% of children in CRB cases were in foster care 15 of the prior 22 months. (Note 7)

2001= In the 5 piloted counties, 76 CRB members reviewed 946 children's cases. (Note 6.5)

2002= 67 % of children in CRB cases were in foster care 15 of the prior 22 months. (Note 7)

Citations

- (1) 1995 Annual Report of the Montana Judiciary, Page 42
- (2) 1996 Annual Report of the Montana Judiciary, Page 7
- (3) 1997 Annual Report of the Montana Judiciary, Page 5
- (4) 1998 Annual Report of the Montana Judiciary, Page 6
- (5) 1999 Annual Report of the Montana Judiciary, Page 3
- (6) 2000 Annual Report of the Montana Judiciary, Page 10
- (6.5) 2001 Annual Report of the Montana Judiciary, Page 18
- (1) 2002 Annual Report of the Montana Judiciary, Page 21
- (2) 2003 Minutes, District Court Council Meeting, Page 3