



Minnesota Citizen Review Panels: Reaching out to protect children

Minnesota Citizen Review Panels provide opportunities for community members to play an integral role in ensuring the child protection system is protecting children from abuse and neglect. Minnesota has panels in Chisago, Hennepin, Ramsey and Winona counties. The Minnesota Department of Human Services is interested in expanding citizen review panels to other parts of the state as well.

Working together for children's well-being

In addition to evaluating different aspects of the child protection system in their own communities, panels also look at ways to improve the child protection system statewide. These panels represent a partnership among:

- Citizens
- Community agencies
- County and tribal child protection systems
- Minnesota Department of Human Services.

Serving multiple purposes

To ensure the child protection system is working well, citizen review panels:

- Increase community understanding of and investment in child protection
- Review the quality, equity and consistency of the child protection system's practices and policies
- Offer insight that those working within the system might overlook
- Provide feedback on what is or isn't working
- Analyze trends and recommend policy changes
- Provide outside validation of the child protection system's successes and staff efforts
- Promote cooperation among community resources and county and tribal child protection
- Advocate for resources to protect children from maltreatment and find permanent homes quickly
- Evaluate how well the Minnesota Department of Human Services complies with its Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act five-year plan.

Serving on citizen review panels

Panel members come from all walks of life. Efforts are made to include people with diverse backgrounds from communities of color and those who grew up in foster care. Panel members must maintain confidentiality, participate in training, and agree to serve an initial four-year term. Training in the following areas is available:

- Child abuse and neglect
- Social work practice and policies
- Child development and attachment
- Cultural considerations, including the Indian Child Welfare Act and heritage preservation
- Dynamics of domestic violence
- Chemical and mental health
- Education and community resources.

Working to strengthen the child protection system

Panel members give their perspective and feedback on the internal workings of the child protection system. To accomplish this, panel members:

- Meet regularly, at least quarterly
- Review records, case files and reports
- Gather information through interviews and observation
- Provide independent insight
- Report findings and recommendations to key leaders
- Participate in educational events (e.g., webinars and conferences)
- Receive ongoing support and consultation from county and tribal agencies and department staff.



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