

IDAHO'S CITIZEN REVIEW PANELS

December 2019 Report to the Child Protection Oversight Committee

Overview

- 2018 & 2019: Public Health Districts received funding from the legislature to support Citizen Review Panels (CRPs)
- The purpose of the CRPs is to evaluate and provide recommendations for the improvement of the child protection system
- Public Health Districts' role: 1) convene meetings for the panels and 2) provide administrative support to coordinate meeting times and reports

Observations

- Limited availability on the court calendar directly results in children being in foster care beyond required time frames
- Termination hesitancy of judges appears to be based not on legal considerations, but ideological considerations
- Social worker shortages result in non-compliance with mandated time lines, policies, and protocols, and staff burnout
- Inconsistent application of policies and protocols delay reunion of families
- Substance abuse complicates the process due to lack of available treatment options and a more robust behavioral health system

Successes

- Panel membership and engagement is strong
- Panels have enhanced their understanding of the foster care system by inviting stakeholders, including foster parents and subject matter experts to panel meetings
- Panel members developed survey to collect case review data
- IDHW support staff are very helpful
- PRIDE training is adequate, but would excel with more extensive training
- Infant Toddler Program exceeds expectations

Challenges

- Unclear of the legislature's intent of CRPs and how their efforts influence change that results in improvements in the foster care system
- eCabinet formatting and missing information
- Communication between Panels and IDHW liaisons varies from district to district

Recommendations

- Invest time and resources in prevention services and strategies, including an overhaul of the adjudication process
- Improve safety assessment criteria so children are removed before too much damage is done
- Increase Trust-based Relational Intervention training for foster parents, case workers, CASAs, judges, and child welfare attorneys
- Standardize the data that the liaison presents to the panel each month so that every panel in the state gets the same matrix from the liaisons no matter where they are
- Hire more support staff, including more visit and transportation technicians for IDHW
- Hire more social workers (associate and bachelor prepared) and provide professional development
- Change policies to afford more protections to children
- Review and update the PRIDE (Parent Resources for Information, Development, and Education) curriculum
- Enhance placement considerations for children with mental and physical health conditions
- Field testimony and recommendations to the court by professionals and experts in their field should have more influence
- Decrease the number of extensions given to biological parents
- Trauma-informed evaluations of children and parents should be part of every case