

Office of the Child Advocate



At a Glance

MICKEY KRAMER, Acting Child Advocate 7/1/2013-9/9/2013

Sarah Eagan, Child Advocate 9/9/2013-6/30/14

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 - \$602,294

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 (OCA). Designated as a division of the OGA, the OCA maintains its independence and statutory authority/responsibilities.

Mission

The Office of the Child Advocate (OCA) speaks for Connecticut's children. The OCA was created in 1995 to be an independent voice for children rather than an administrator of programs. OCA's mission is to oversee the care and protection of Connecticut's children 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.

Achievements/Improvements 2013-2014

- In July 2013, OCA and the Office of Protection and Advocacy for Persons with Disabilities (OPA) released a report: "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." The report is available on the OCA and OPA websites. OCA/OPA look forward to continued work with State Department of Education (SDE) and the Department of Children and Families (DCF) on implementation of the recommendations.
- In September 2013, OCA co-sponsored a statewide educational forum with the CT Interagency Restraint and Seclusion Prevention Initiative at Central Connecticut State University. Participants included national experts, consumers, providers, and others. OCA continues active participation on this initiative.
- In January 2014, OCA and OPA co-hosted a forum regarding seclusion and restraint in schools. National experts were featured in keynote presentations as well as a roundtable discussion with legislators, agency representatives, and parents. OCA continues to meet with SDE administrative leadership and other key stakeholders to work toward the goal of reducing and eventually eliminating the use of seclusion and restraint in CT's schools.

- In response to SDE data, in February 2014, OCA initiated a statewide review of restraint and seclusion practices within CT schools, focusing specifically on students in grades K through five.
- Continued to co-chair the CT Child Fatality Review Panel. Reviewed the unexpected/untimely deaths of 82 children and youth during calendar year 2013 and scores of critical incidents involving children. Advocated for all statutory appointments to the CFRP be made.
- Continued an independent review of the December 2012 Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting deaths of 20 children and 6 adults. In accordance with 46a-13l (11)(c) , the CT Child Fatality Review voted unanimously on January 30, 2013 to have the OCA initiate an investigation focused on the “mechanism” of the deaths of the 20 children at Sandy Hook Elementary School. The inventory and collection of extensive documentation began early in 2013. This complex investigation remains ongoing with the expectation of a public report in the fall of 2014.
- In conjunction with the CT Child Fatality Review Panel, OCA issued a public health alert: “Unsafe Sleep Related Deaths are the Leading Cause of Preventable Deaths of Infants in CT,” in April 2014.
- On June 3, 2014, the OCA released a public information bulletin regarding numerous unexpected/unexplained infant and toddler deaths which had occurred in the first 6 months of 2014: “Child Fatality Review,” This bulletin described OCA and CFRP’s ongoing responsibilities regarding child fatality reviews. OCA and CFRP will be issuing regular public health alerts regarding prevalent causes of child fatalities in our state and recommendations for prevention.
- Through our ombudsman activities, OCA responded to approximately 400 citizen concerns about the provision of state funded services to children. Approximately 18% of these calls resulted in the need for OCA to investigate pursuant to 46a-13l. OCA’s individual, child-specific investigations virtually always pertain to children and youth with complex needs who are involved with multiple state and community service systems. Frequent issues in this year’s investigations include: ability of families of children with autism to access critical treatment and support services, well-being of children in the child protection system, access to behavioral health services in the community, advocating for appropriate special education services for children with special needs.
- As previously reported OCA has struggled with an ineffective and outdated data management system. As FY ’14 concludes, OCA is poised to install Legal Files, a sophisticated case management system that will enable more thorough and accurate data collection and reporting of the Office’s activity.
- In November 2013, the Child Advocate issued comments to the Healthcare Advocate on the State Innovation Model (SIM) draft proposal, urging full optimization of the SIM framework for pre-natal and infant care via evidence-based home visitation services, expanded screenings

by primary care providers, and strengthening care coordination between community-based and school-based providers.

- 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.
- Continued active monitoring of the care and treatment of children in DCF facilities, including Solnit South and North, and CJTS/Pueblo. OCA continues to meet frequently with facility and agency leadership to discuss their implementation of reforms and best practices regarding data collection and analysis, decreased reliance on restrictive measures, and ensuring high quality, effective treatment for some of the state's most vulnerable youth.
- OCA participated on the Task Force to Study the Provision of Behavioral Health Services for Young Adults in CT, as established by Public Act 13-3, Section 66; this Task Force issued a report containing findings and recommendations in April 2014.
- 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, including the young adult inpatient unit at CT Valley Hospital and DMHAS' Whiting Forensic. OCA also continues monitoring of the well-being of youth with serious and persistent mental health issues who are supported in DMHAS funded apartments and other community settings. OCA meets regularly with DMHAS leadership to advocate for developmentally appropriate supports and services for this population.
- In partnership with the Office of the Healthcare Advocate, OCA executed 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.
- Continued monitoring and oversight of the conditions of confinement and treatment of incarcerated youth in the state's adult prisons. OCA continues to meet regularly with Department of Correction's executive 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.
- Continued active participation on the CT Family Support Council. OCA has assumed a leadership role on a subcommittee of the FSC developed to focus specifically on school climate and the implications for children with disabilities.
- OCA continues to monitor the implementation of a multi-year coordinated plan to expand and improve the existing Autism Spectrum Disorders service system in CT, as recommended by the state's Autism Feasibility Study workgroup. The workgroup, comprised of consumers,

advocates, representatives from the public and private sector, and academics, was created pursuant to P.A. 11-6 and submitted its report to the legislature in January 2013.

- 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. Legislative initiatives supported by OCA included: collaboration among Boards of Education and law enforcement personnel to reduce school-based arrests of children and youth in CT; recommendations of the CT Sentencing Commission regarding lengthy sentences for crimes committed by a child or youth; efforts to prevent homelessness for youth under the care of the Commissioner of the Department of Children and Families; and ensuring access to quality pre-k education for children in DCF's care.
- OCA's communication and public education initiatives this past year have included multiple professional trainings on myriad topics related to child well-being, initiation of a listserv to ensure broad dissemination of both OCA work product as well as relevant research and other child focused information, and the development of regular OCA e-newsletters