

To: Cuyahoga County Executive and County Council  
From: The Division of Children and Family Services Advisory Board

### Background

The Cuyahoga County Division of Children and Family Services Advisory Board was established in February 2019 and has engaged in monitoring and advocacy on matters related to children and families in or at risk of entering the child welfare system. This summary serves as an update on our activities for 2023.

### DCFS Board Responsibility:

"The Division of Children and Family Services Advisory Board ("DCFS Board") established under O.R.C. 5153.05 as an "advisory committee on children services" and shall be comprised of up to ten members who shall provide independent perspective and feedback to the County and the Cuyahoga County Division of Children and Family Services ("DCFS") leadership. The DCFS Board shall also link the Board and the community it serves. The DCFS Board is advisory and shall not have any decision-making authority over DCFS or the County."

### Public Meetings and Community Outreach

The DCFS Board is committed to transparency. The meetings are open to the public. Advisory Board meeting agendas and meeting minutes are posted on the CCDFCS Website. Here is a list of the meetings for 2023: 2/1/, 4/5, 6/7, 8/2, 4/23, and 10/6. Due to the pandemic, we were meeting remotely over Zoom. The Zoom information is also posted publicly. At the meeting in October, we resumed meeting in person and continue with a mix of virtual and in-person meetings.

Thank you to Director Fletcher and DCFS staff for giving the community a space to be heard in their newly returned Town Hall meetings. The Advisory board was invited to participate, and multiple board members attended the town Hall Meetings. At these meetings, the community's consistent ask/need was adequate pay for jobs and housing for parents and caregivers. It also provided a centralized place to find resources within Cuyahoga County and a more straightforward referral process for agencies and the community.

### Partner Engagement

This year, we invited several guest presenters to help us understand the challenges faced by DCFS and to connect with community partners to address common issues and concerns.

County Executive Chris Ronayne. The Advisory Board would like to thank Executive Ronayne for participating in our conversation on the placement crisis in Cuyahoga County. We discussed his plans to switch focus from child welfare to child wellness. The Board has asked how the Advisory Board could best be utilized. Executive Ronayne suggested that we could help to inform the strategic plan. The Board will continue supporting the County Executive on a strategic plan and other matters.

Robin Martin, FCFC Director, presented on Ohio RISE and the coverage benefits associated with the program. The Advisory Board explored opportunities to enhance collaborative efforts to support dually served youth.

Chief Sonya Prior Jones informed us of Mayor Bibb's strategic vision. A Children's Cabinet, lakefront development plans, violence prevention, youth employment, and job and business growth are among some things discussed.

Chris Anderson shared his critical perspectives from his experience in foster care and his journey as a young adult. He expressed that there is a need for improved preparation of life skills for aged-out youth as well as hiring informed and equipped staff who understand trauma and conduct their job with compassion and respect.

#### The Data Dashboard

As Chair of the Intervention Committee, Dr. David Crampton has developed our key data priorities and is also the writer of a published op-ed to reach the community. The Dashboard has been crucial for the Board to guide our monitoring and assessing progress on some DCFS reform efforts. We appreciate the ongoing support from the DCFS director and staff. Some key findings include the ongoing staffing challenges with hiring and retention. DCFS has grown significantly, with now 100% M.O.U.s with law enforcement.

#### Racial Equity Focus

There are very real racial disparities in the way children of color are referred to, screened "in," and managed by DCFS. They are supported by the data dashboard mentioned above. We will continue to seek data by race and are working with DCFS to receive this information. We continue to attempt to engage with the Citizen's Advisory Council on Equity and other communities.

#### Prevention Focus

In 2021, the Shubert Center on Child Studies at CWRU presented its findings on a review of the systemic child protection team (CPT) model, per our request. We have continued to make ourselves available to county leadership to advance the systemwide CPTI and to monitor the implementation of the CPT model with Canopy and the big three hospital systems. Our goal is for the effective adoption of CPT to improve early intervention in at-risk families and prevent future harm.

#### Placement Crisis Advocacy

Over several years, our Board has repeatedly raised concerns regarding the extended time children have had to stay in the J.E.H. Building due to a need for supportive care in stable placements. In addition to raising concerns in regular meetings with the DCFS director, we have made suggestions and urged the creation of an alternative coordinated response and an increase in preventative supports (i.e., respite, crisis stabilization, behavioral intervention, etc.) to keep children in home settings. We were pleased to see the RFP for a child wellness center and will continue to monitor this progress.

In 2024, we plan to continue community education. We are following the data dashboard and encouraging ongoing support for the CPT model in Cuyahoga County and the effective implementation of a comprehensive child wellness center. We are also planning to re-center a focus on prevention to reduce trauma experienced by children. We are working on bringing the multiple systems together and addressing many of the key points from the Board.

On behalf of the DCFS Advisory Board

Lakecia Wild- Chair

Angela Newman White -Vice Chair

Beverly Charles- Secretary

Gabriella Celeste- Committee Chair

Dr. David Crampton -Committee Chair

Natasha Sam-Yellowe-Board Member

Dr. Andrew Garner-Board Member

Debra Rex-Board Member

Verna Darby-Board Member