

MISSISSIPPI CAPTA UPDATE JUNE 2015

Legislation

No significant changes were made to affect the state's eligibility.

Changes in Use of CAPTA Funds

No significant changes in use of CAPTA Funds since last update.

Use of CAPTA Funds

CAPTA Funds have been used to fund a portion of the Mississippi Centralized Intake Program and to fund a full-time DFCS attorney to review cases of maltreatment in care and special investigations. The funds being utilized in this way helps Mississippi to improve the child protective services system in the intake, assessment, screening, and investigation of reports of child abuse or neglect per section 106(a)(1) of CAPTA.

Mississippi State Level Citizens Review Board

Background

On August 25, 2011 the Citizens Review Board met at the Mississippi Department of Human Services (DHS) with the purpose of making a formal transition to three panels, Northern, Central, and Southern. During this reporting period of October 1, 2011-September 30, 2012, three people were delegated as leads of the three panels. Efforts were made by the DHS staff to contact these delegates for information about the activities of the panels. These efforts were not successful.

In early 2012 DHS received communications from the lead of the Southern Panel reporting that they had not met yet in 2012 but had plans to meet in the spring. This panel had expressed interest in the policies and practices of DHS concerning unmarried couples and the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) population with regards to being foster parents.

The Northern Panel focused on engaging fathers, recruitment of social workers and community resources, especially mental health services. This information was reported to MDHS in May 2012 and no further information was received.

The Central Panel was comprised of a few dedicated members with continued efforts in building a team. At their last meeting in April 2012 they developed strategies to increase membership such as utilizing the members of the Regional Implementation Teams, since the Regional Implementation Teams already include community stakeholders.

Due to personal and professional changes among the delegates charged with leading the panels, the Southern and Northern Teams disbanded in early 2012. As a result of the lack of participation described above the Citizen's Review Panel continues to operate under the same recommendations as 2011:

1. Continue to assist in restructuring three regional panels.
2. Assist the Citizens Review Board in the recruitment and support of panel members – notably from underrepresented sectors, such as business, direct service providers (e.g. foster parents), and past service recipients.
3. Include panel representation in planning activity related to the litigation settlement and accreditation. In particular, utilize specialized panel member expertise (e.g. regarding service expansion) whenever possible.
4. Assist the panel(s) in sustaining regular contact with appropriate agency personnel relative to Board priorities and concerns that may emerge over the course of the year.

During a meeting between DFCS staff and the Children’s Bureau staff in April 2013, it was discussed that MS is struggling with membership and direction for the Citizen’s Review Panels and Board. Although Mississippi continues to have citizen review input through the Children’s Justice Act Task Force, The Children’s Trust Fund, and the statewide Child Death Review Panel, it was discussed that there is a need to explore other ways to achieve the outcomes desired from having Citizen’s Review Panels. It was discussed that Mississippi may want to explore ways to engage stakeholders who have already shown interest in the work of DFCS through their participation in Regional Implementation Teams throughout the state, possibly even through participation in regional Continuous Quality Improvement Reviews.

Subsequently, the Prevention Unit met to strategize in June 2013. Plans were made to explore the following options to improve citizen’s participation in review of DFCS:

- Form a Citizen’s Review Panel consisting of former and current foster children. The Division Director of the Independent Living Unit would be instrumental in this plan, and could utilize the Youth Leadership Team to help with the process.
- The Children’s Justice Act (CJA) Task Force, the Children’s Trust Fund (CTF), and the statewide Child Death Review Team are already serving in the role of citizen’s review for Mississippi. In order to maximize this effort, we will present to the CJA and CTF the process and intent for Citizen’s Review Panels. We will explain that as citizens and stakeholders with representation throughout the state, their perspectives and opinions are very valuable to the agency. We would inquire to see if any members are interested in forming sub-groups to work on a project for a specified period of time or if they would like to work as a group and provide input. These groups are already provided with updates on the agency, but more effort can be invested in achieving input on the information given.
- Continue to use the statewide Child Death Review Team annual report to inform policymakers of changes that may need to be made for safety of children based on Mississippi child death statistics.

- Invite stakeholders from Regional Implementation Teams, Children’s Justice Act Task Force, Children’s Trust Fund, and statewide Child Death Review Panel to participate in Continuous Quality Improvement Case Review process by shadowing DFCS staff reviewing cases and by participating in meetings in which strengths and areas needing improvement for that region are discussed along with strategies for improvement.
- Continue to seek technical assistance from Blake Jones, and with any others recommended by Children’s Bureau. Continue to participate in national meetings with other Citizen’s Review Panels in order to learn about successful outcomes in other states.

Response to Citizen Review Panel Recommendations and Update on Goals, June 2014

Mississippi has multiple entities serving as Citizen’s Review Panels. Regular updates regarding the agency are given to stakeholders and community partners serving on the Children’s Justice Act Task Force, The Children’s Trust Fund Advisory Board, and Regional/County Practice Model Implementation Teams, with feedback for improvement being solicited. A Teen Advisory Board (TAB) is also being utilized as a way to receive feedback from those teens who are or have been served by the agency to provide feedback for improvement.

Mississippi DFCS has historically utilized the CJA Task Force, Child Death Review Team, and the Citizen’s Review Board as citizen review panels. There were plans to create three teams throughout the state utilizing the schools of social work from three universities. However, the leaders of those teams from the Citizen’s Review Board are now either serving in other areas or unable to serve in that capacity. As part of Mississippi’s Practice Model implementation, DFCS has sought with success to include stakeholders and community partners in Regional Implementation Teams in the communities where they live and serve. This is where the stakeholders and partners are updated on the progress of the agency as well as strengths and needs specific to that area of the state, allowing for feedback, input, and problem-solving collaboration targeted to the specific characteristics of that area. As these are from the same community member pool who were being asked to serve on Citizen’s Review Panels, it was realized that pulling them away from their local community involvement would be defeating the purpose, when the Regional Implementation Teams serve the purpose for the spirit and intent of the Citizen Review Panels. Mississippi DFCS is committed to the concept of engaging community leaders, citizens, and partners to join together to meet the needs of the community, within the supportive framework of state policies, resources, and collaborations.

Update

Children’s Justice Act (CJA) Task Force

The Children’s Justice Act Task Force acknowledges that they serve as a Citizen’s Review Panel, as they receive information on the agency’s strengths, challenges, and progress toward improvement and as they provide input based on their varying backgrounds and responsibilities.

Recommendations from the CJA Task Force and the agency’s responses are included in the Annual Report on the use of CJA funds and the plans for the upcoming year, which is filed separately from the APSR.

Children's Trust Fund

The Children's Trust Fund Advisory Board acknowledges that they serve as a Citizen's Review Panel and are willing to provide additional input regarding the agency's progress toward improvement.

Teen Advisory Board

The Teen Advisory Board (TAB) is being utilized as a Citizen's Review Panel. The TAB developed an 8-page publication called "Mississippi Youth Voice," in which 30 members of the Teen Advisory Board came together to share their concerns and solutions for a system to better support youth in foster care and those transitioning out of foster care.

The top recommendations include:

- Ensuring that youth (particularly in group homes) have access to private and unrestricted communication with their social worker and other important adults
- Ensuring that youth have access to medical records for informed healthcare decisions
- Ensuring that youth have easy access to vital documents (particularly important for youth placed out of county of origin)
- Ensuring that youth take an active role in their case planning (not just being in the room while the plan is being made for them)
- Helping youth to communicate their wishes in court
- Helping youth to maintain connections with siblings and placed together when possible
- Helping youth to obtain personal hygiene items separate from allowance

The agency is responding by listening to these concerns, arranged for many of the youth to present their concerns at a statewide meeting of frontline supervisors and administrative staff, and is working on resolutions.

Other

The agency continues to encourage and utilize community involvement in helping each county and region to ensure the child welfare social work practice in that area is consistent with the Mississippi Practice Model.

The agency retains membership on the statewide multidisciplinary Child Death Review Team.

CAPTA Fatality and Near Fatality Public Disclosure Policy

DFCS policy includes the provision that DFCS will adhere with the CAPTA Policy regarding public disclosure of fatalities and near fatalities due to child abuse or neglect. MS DFCS utilizes the Serious Incident Report process for the purpose of communication between the field staff and

administrative staff regarding child fatalities and other serious incidents. Policy revisions have been made to require field staff to complete Serious Incident Reports on fatalities and near fatalities, thereby aiding in the collection of information on fatalities and near fatalities so that it is readily available when requested according to CAPTA guidelines. A change in the electronic case management data system has been made so that the worker can indicate, at the time of intake and at the time of investigation closure, whether there was a child fatality or near-fatality in the case per CAPTA definitions.

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