
Minnesota Citizen Review Panels Annual Report

Reporting Year 2022



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Overview of Citizen Review Panels

	
<p>Mission: To ensure Minnesota's child welfare systems are protecting children and not causing harm.</p>	<p>Vision: Community members are powerful partners in shaping local and statewide child welfare policy and practice.</p>

Citizen Review Panels are community advisory groups federally mandated under the [Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act \(PL 111-320\)](#) and [by Minnesota Statute 256.01, subd. 15](#). Panels are comprised of volunteer community members broadly representative of the community in which the panel is established.

Panel members:

- Examine state and local child welfare agency policies and practices to evaluate the extent to which agencies are effectively discharging child protection responsibilities.
- Make policy and practice recommendations for equitable, systemic improvement.

Panels represent a partnership among community members, local child protection agencies, and the state child welfare agency. Minnesota has had panels since 1999. Currently, panels exist in Chisago, Hennepin, Ramsey and Winona Counties. The Minnesota Department of Human Services would support community member-driven efforts to expand Citizen Review Panels to other areas of the state.

This annual report provides a summary of activities and recommendations of each Minnesota panel for calendar year 2022, and the department's corresponding response. Previous [reports](#) are available online.

Chisago County Citizen Review Panel

Mission statement: To facilitate citizen participation and provide opportunities for members of the community to play an integral role in ensuring that federal, state and county child protection systems protect children from abuse and neglect and meet the permanency needs of children.

County Report Summary

The Chisago County Citizen Review Panel met bi-monthly and included the following community members: Deb Kerschner, Carol Schumann, Nancy Grossmann, Karen Kennedy (new) and Allyssa Sowka (new). Its primary focus in 2022 was recruiting new members and broadening community scope. Chisago County staff maintained the agency website with panel information and continues to update the agency with information regarding the Citizens Review Panel processes. This ensures internal staff are educated and prepared for potential involvement in panel recruitment efforts. Networking and community involvement afford the panel the opportunity to cast a broader scope in attracting new members. Recent recruitment efforts included placing advertisements in local newspapers, the Chisago Lakes Chamber of Commerce newsletter and the local library network. Recruitment efforts resulted in two new members joining the panel in 2022.

Panel members participated in five maltreatment reconsideration case reviews in 2022. Members were thorough in their review and diligent in meeting mandated timelines. All decisions were upheld.

In June 2022, panel members participated in Minnesota's statewide Citizen Review Panel annual meeting, which was held virtually. The department presented on the purpose, mission, vision and structure of panels. Then each panel presented on highlights of their activities, successes and challenges. In breakout sessions, members shared ideas and feedback on the topics of retention, recruitment, selection and onboarding. The department panel coordinator and Ombudsperson for American Indian Families each shared brief agency updates before the meeting was concluded.

The panel's recommendation for the department is to continue to support and assist in new member recruitment and other activities the panel feels would be beneficial in 2023.

Department Response

The department congratulates Chisago County Citizen Review Panel members for their continued – and successful – recruitment efforts. The department will continue to support and encourage recruitment and retention. In April 2022, the department issued a statewide news release that featured Citizen Review Panels and highlighted the need for new panel members. The department was pleased to be able to leverage its statewide communication platforms to elevate the work of panels and the importance of community participation in the evaluation and improvement of child welfare practices, policies and outcomes.

The department applauds panel members and Chisago County staff for their strong partnership. Chisago County staff have been an outstanding resource for the panel and exemplify robust collaboration with the community.

Hennepin County Citizen Review Panel

Mission statement: As citizen volunteers, we collaborate to understand, communicate and recommend improvement to the child protection systems, as well as engage our communities to ensure the safety and well-being of all our children and families.

County Report Summary

The Hennepin County Citizen Review Panel met monthly and was comprised of the following community members: Joan Molenaar (chair), Beatrice Officer (hiatus), Elena Leomi, Alecia Adner-Hernandez (new), Andrea Boyle-Larry (new), Emma Daugherty (new), Mariah Mirbell-Nelson (new) and Stacey Walker (new). The following Hennepin County staff regularly attended meetings and actively supported panel efforts: Michelle LeFebvre (January – June), Cathy Spann (April – December) and Kimette Almon (January – December). The following state agency staff also participated in meetings to support panel activities: Sarah Bello (department, January – June), Nicole Lindemyer (department, June – December) and Jill Esch (Ombudsperson for American Indian Families, January – December).

Panel activities centered around recruitment, Collaborative Safety case reviews and training. Panel members also discussed interests, directions, expectations and potential changes to the panel. A panel member created and distributed an online survey for members to complete to provide their input on these topics. The panel is enthused about the great potential for the future.

Recruitment

The panel reviewed past recruitment efforts over the preceding two to three years. In April 2022, the department issued a statewide news release that featured Citizen Review Panels and highlighted the need for new panel members. This generated an unprecedented amount of interest in the Hennepin County Citizen Review Panel. Twelve inquiries were received. County staff and panel members collaborated to review applications and conduct interviews. The panel was delighted to welcome five new members in 2022 who bring energy and commitment to the work of the panel. The new members represent a diverse cross-section of the community, including health care, family service agencies and nonprofit organizations, among others. The panel anticipates additional recruitment efforts during 2023.

Case Reviews

The panel discussed its involvement in Collaborative Safety case reviews and determined to continue its participation. Hennepin County provided panel members with training on the Collaborative Safety model. Hennepin County was highlighted in the Collaborative Safety LLC national newsletter in December 2022 as the first agency in the country to partner with its local Citizen Review Panel to study systemic barriers and support systemic improvement and accountability. Panel members participate in monthly division case reviews, mapping and learning point discussions. Panel members bring their background and community experience to this work of improving child protection practices and outcomes.

In 2022, panel members participated in seven case reviews, with several of the cases having multiple monthly sessions. Panel members provided overviews of reviewed cases at monthly panel meetings to share their learning with fellow panel members.

Training

Two panel members, Joan and Beatrice, attended the annual National Citizen Review Panel Conference in May 2022. The in-person conference was held in California. Both panel members enjoyed the learning opportunity and shared their experiences with the panel following their return.

In June 2022, panel members participated in Minnesota's statewide Citizen Review Panel annual meeting, which was held virtually. The department presented on the purpose, mission, vision and structure of panels. Then each panel presented on highlights of their activities, successes, and challenges. In breakout sessions, members shared ideas and feedback on the topics of retention, recruitment, selection, and onboarding. The department panel coordinator and Ombudsperson for American Indian Families each shared brief agency updates before the meeting was concluded.

Throughout the year, panel members requested, received, and discussed various educational resources. Topics included:

- Department presentation on the federal Family First Prevention Services Act
- Updates and materials from the Ombudsperson for American Indian Families on the *Brackeen v. Haaland* case (SCOTUS case regarding the federal Indian Child Welfare Act)
- Hennepin County's foster parent guide
- Minnesota Office of the Legislative Auditor 2022 evaluation report on child protection removals and reunifications.

Looking ahead to 2023, the panel plans to:

- Continue their partnership with Hennepin County's Collaborative Safety Unit.
- Continue recruitment efforts.
- Search and select an additional area of focus.
- Continue onboarding and educating panel members.

Recommendations

The panel's recommendations for Hennepin County are:

- Continue partnering with the panel on Collaborative Safety case reviews and ongoing training opportunities.
- Continue supporting panel recruitment efforts.

The panel's recommendations for the department are:

- Continue supporting panel recruitment efforts.
- Continue providing the panel with informational updates and opportunities to learn and share expertise across all of Minnesota's Citizen Review Panels.

The panel also recommends to other Minnesota panels to explore the use of the Collaborative Safety model, noting its success in making systemic improvements and moving away from blame/shame.

Department Response

The department applauds the Hennepin County Citizen Review Panel for its ongoing groundbreaking work with Hennepin County's Collaborative Safety Unit. As the December 2022 Collaborative Safety LLC newsletter noted, the panel serves as a national example of community voice integrated in child welfare systemic learning and improvement.

In April 2022, the department issued a statewide news release that featured Citizen Review Panels and highlighted the need for new panel members. The department was pleased to be able to leverage its statewide communication platforms to elevate the work of panels and the importance of community participation in the evaluation and improvement of child welfare practices, policies and outcomes.

Throughout the year, the department hosted quarterly virtual roundtables for leadership from all Minnesota panels to provide updates, share advice and learnings and to encourage one another. In June, the department hosted a statewide virtual gathering for all of Minnesota's panels. This half-day event brought together panel members and county liaisons from all panels for a time of visioning, sharing and brainstorming. The department concurs with the Hennepin County Citizen Review Panel that collaboration statewide is beneficial. The department appreciates the panel's regular participation and meaningful contributions in these meetings.

Ramsey County Citizen Review Panel

Mission statement: Provide opportunities for citizens to play an integral role in ensuring the child protection system is protecting children from abuse and neglect and ensuring a nurturing home environment.

County Report Summary

The Ramsey County Citizen Review Panel met monthly, comprised of the following community members: Tonya Long, Tony Porter (term ended June 2022) and Laura Ink (resigned). Meetings included updates from Ramsey County staff, state staff from the department and Ombudsperson for American Indian Families and discussions regarding recruitment, county and state policies and panel projects.

Panel members assisted Ramsey County with filling the Community Advisory Council (CAC) coordinator position, which supports the panel and other community groups. Members helped develop the CAC coordinator job description, review applications and interview applicants. The new CAC coordinator started in February 2022.

The panel continued work on developing a survey for Ramsey County youth in foster care. The survey goal is to explore experiences, diverse identities and well-being of youth in care, as well as identify ways

Ramsey County Human Services and its partners can best support them. Meetings with Ramsey County research staff were held July 2022 through October 2022.

Surveys were proposed for:

- Children 10 – 17 years old
- Youth 18 – 24 years old, and
- Children adopted from foster care.

Survey responses would be anonymous. The panel explored partnership with St. Paul Public Schools to assist with survey administration, but they were not able to move forward at this time. The panel will explore other partnership options.

In addition to the survey project, the panel has engaged in recruitment conversations. Ramsey County and the Minnesota Department of Human Services are in the process of updating new member appointment processes, which has resulted in some barriers. It was decided that the panel would add new members using the existing county process until the statewide appointment process change is fully implemented by the state department.

The county agency did not request the panel to conduct any maltreatment reconsiderations or child fatality case reviews in 2022.

Department Response

The department is pleased to provide increased assistance for panel member recruitment. In April 2022, the department issued a statewide news release that featured Citizen Review Panels and highlighted the need for new panel members. The department was eager to leverage its statewide communication platforms to elevate the work of panels and the importance of community participation in the evaluation and improvement of child welfare practices, policies, and outcomes.

In May 2022, two panel members, Tony and Tonya, attended the in-person National Citizen Review Panel Conference in California, hosted by California's Department of Social Services. The Minnesota department thanks Tony and Tonya for their participation and leadership on the conference planning committee and for their attendance.

Winona County Citizen Review Panel

Mission statement: Promote and support the continuous improvement of a child protection system that will provide safety, permanency and well-being for all children in Winona County.

County Report Summary

The Winona County Citizen Review Panel met quarterly, comprised of the following community members: Tammi Stoos (co-chair), Betsy Rowekamp (co-chair), Barb Klink (secretary) and Judy Davis. Meetings included ongoing discussions regarding the purpose of Citizen Review Panels, potential

avenues for recruitment, efforts to assist Winona County Health and Human Services and how to best support families throughout the community. Due to an abrupt change in administration at Winona County and perceived struggle within Winona County, the panel had difficulty partnering with them in 2022. In addition, ongoing internal questioning regarding the purpose and role of the panel resulted in deeper discussions regarding the future of the Winona County panel. The panel has not yet come to a final decision.

Various training and conference information was shared throughout the year. Members are encouraged to be active in community groups/meetings and to share information learned elsewhere to broaden perspective on ongoing needs, resources and ideas that may have an impact on the safety, permanency and well-being of children throughout Winona County.

Gift cards were given to all child protection workers in 2022. The gifts were donated by panel members.

Child Protection Investigation Redeterminations 2022

The panel continues to provide a very important service to the Winona County Child Protection Unit by being available to conduct redetermination reviews on substantiated child protection cases. Under [Minnesota state statute 626.556 subd, 10i](#) provides that the subject of a child abuse or neglect report, for which there has been a substantiated finding, has the right to request a redetermination of that finding. A group of panel members is then assembled and reviews the entire investigation including all reports, interviews and evidence. The case is usually presented by the investigator and then the panel conducts their independent review and makes their determination regarding the initial finding. In 2022, Winona County had four requests for reconsideration of a maltreatment determination. All requests were fulfilled by panel members in a timely manner.

Child Protection System: Oversight and Concerns

The panel believes stressors, such as unemployment, chemical usage, mental health needs, domestic violence, lack of resources and lack of understanding, among others, continue to impact families and children in their communities. The panel has also discussed the Winona County community's response to these stressors as well as what the panel's role is in challenging the culture and beliefs regarding "whose responsibility is it" to address these challenges. The panel plans to continue grappling with these issues and is committed to having hard conversations, to challenge unhelpful thinking and biases and to be transparent with concerns while building on areas that are finding success.

Looking Ahead

Discussions regarding the effectiveness and benefits of the panel continue to occur. The hope is to have clarity and a specific mission in 2023. The panel has dwindled in numbers. The panel continues to explore what it wishes to do about this. In 2023, the panel will address the future of the panel and focus on the exact nature of the panel's work, goals and mission. If the panel wishes to continue its existence and do additional tasks beyond redeterminations, members will then discuss recruitment with the hope of growing in size and diversity.

Acknowledgments

Panel members appreciate the guidance and support of the Minnesota Department of Human Services and the Winona County Department of Human Services. They look forward to the potential of a positive and productive relationship in 2023.

Department Response

The department is committed to continuing to provide strategic guidance and support to the Winona County Citizen Review Panel. The department appreciates the compassion and generosity exhibited by panel members. The department remains willing and able to support and encourage panel members, as they explore their role and ponder the panel's future.