



September 30, 2024

Mary Jo Pankoke, Chair  
Serious Injury/Near Fatality Citizen Review Panel  
Nebraska Children and Families Foundation  
215 Centennial Mall South, Suite 200  
Lincoln, NE 68508

RE: Annual Report and Recommendations

Dear Serious Injury/Near Fatality Citizen Review Panel Members,

The Division of Children and Family Services (CFS) would like to extend our sincere gratitude to all the members of the Citizen Review Panel (CRP) for Serious Injury and Near Fatality. The committee's dedication to providing thorough case reviews and recommendations is invaluable. CFS has carefully reviewed the 2024 Annual Report recommendations and provided corresponding responses below:

**1. Continue efforts to address the presence of racial disparities among seriously injured children.**

CFS is dedicated to ensuring all children are served equally as they interact with our system. As a division, we are currently developing a training module to educate our communities about mandatory reporting including awareness about cultural factors. This module can be used by schools, hospitals, childcare facilities, and community partners. CFS is also working to integrate new, evidence-based assessments that will help ensure consistent decision making while addressing individual experiences and cultural needs. CFS also continues to collect and report data on the demographics of youth and families served to inform ongoing practices.

**2. Develop strategies to strengthen early development education programs and parenting instruction and address the presence of racial disparities among seriously injured children.**

CFS acknowledges the critical role early development and education programs have in building a strong foundation for children and families. CFS is actively investing in prevention efforts at the community level to help strengthen family's social networks and access to local resources. In response to community involvement, CFS provides community-level data to the 23 Bring up Nebraska Community Collaboratives to ensure individualized community decisions about the needs and service array within the community. Implementation and expansion of Healthy Families America and Parents as Teachers is occurring statewide, emphasizing the importance of hiring bilingual staff in educating and encouraging diversity and identifying barriers to services using a curriculum that promotes social-emotional development, especially for families who have experienced adverse childhood experiences. This prevention work also brings together community stakeholders and encourages medical providers to be proactive with parenting resources and education in various languages instead of making hotline

calls. Collaboration with the Department of Public Health on safe sleep campaigns in high-needs and targeted areas as well as the development of a new pilot program, Family Connects (being initiated in Douglas County) will allow new mothers the opportunity to have access to nursing home visitors. Finally, the creation of public awareness campaigns for Central Navigation will allow for families to more readily seek support and services within their community.

**3. Continue efforts to strengthen coordination across disciplines on child abuse and neglect investigations.**

Per CFS procedure, near fatality and severe injury cases, require collaboration with the Child Advocacy Centers and a referral to the Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDT). Individual MDT's develop local protocols to determine which cases require review. The Subcommittee under the Commission for the Protection of Children reviews statewide MDT protocols, including the criteria for referral and review of cases. The subcommittee is working to align the statewide MDT protocols to create consistency across the state. The subcommittee's recommendations will be shared with CFS when they are finalized.

The Office of the Inspector General for Child Welfare also investigates incidents resulting in death or serious injury that occur in foster homes, private agencies, childcare facilities, or other programs under contract with Juvenile Probation and the Department of Health and Human Services, as well as cases involving an investigation under the Child Protection Act open for no more than one year. The OIG identifies systemic issues and makes recommendations for improvement.

Additionally, CFS has developed an internal procedure for reviewing critical incidents and making recommendations for changes to training as well as practices and policies.

**4. Ensure ICWA identification is completed at the onset of a case opening.**

CFS currently provides guidance on identifying Native American children in all cases, including alternative response, non-court, and court cases, and at various stages as the family progresses through intake, assessments, and case planning. The Child and Family Service Specialist (CFSS) is responsible for asking any person, including the reporter, parents, child (if age-appropriate), extended family members, school, childcare facilities, etc., whether any family members are eligible for tribal membership. A CFSS is trained and encouraged to be observant of the home environment during home visits to identify any potential linkage to an Indian heritage, which could lead to open conversations about Native American heritage. CFS has developed a comprehensive training, including various webinars, in-person trainings, and new worker sessions which specifically address Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) identification practices. Additionally, CFS reviews 60% of ICWA cases to ensure compliance with the federal ICWA laws, including asking the family about Native American heritage.

Sincerely,



Alyssa Bish  
Director of Children and Family Services  
Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services