**Office of Ombudsperson for Families**

**OBFF Joint Meeting of Community-Specific Boards**

**Tuesday, September 16, 2025**

**4:30 p.m. – 6:00 p.m.**  
  
This meeting was conducted [via WebEx video/audio](https://minnesota.webex.com/minnesota/ldr.php?RCID=11f4768377420b546c24ada762354ddb)

*Mission: To ensure that children and families are protected by law in all child placement proceedings conducted by public and private agencies.*

# Board Members Present:

African American Board: Glenda Rooney

Asian Pacific Board: Derek Kuns, Thanh Glasco

Spanish-Speaking Board: Juan Linares, Jesús Villaseñor, Sonia Davila Williams

# Board Members Absent:

African American Board: Gina Washington, Ella Gross, Jean Webb-Bradford, Imogene Koehler

Asian Pacific Board: Yi Li You

Spanish-Speaking Board: none

# Staff Present:

Muriel Gubasta, Ann Hill, Manuel Zuniga, Beth Chaplin, Katie Heilman, Rachel Lovejoy

# Guest Speakers:

* Jennifer Sommerfeld, Government Relations Director, Department of Children, Youth, and Families
* Heidi Ombisa Skallet, Legislative & Policy Coordinator, Child Safety & Permanency, Department of Children, Youth, and Families
* Michelle Seymore, Director, Child Safety and Permanency, Department of Children, Youth, and Families
* Windy Ross, Director, Training and Prevention, Department of Children, Youth, and Families

# Call to Order

A Joint meeting of Community-Specific Boards was conducted via WebEx video/audio on September 16. The Meeting was convened at 4:32 pm by Juan Linares, chair of the Spanish-Speaking Families Board.

# Adoption of the Agenda

The agenda was adopted as quorum was reached. Glenda Rooney moved to approve, and Jesús Villaseñor seconded. The motion was carried.

# Board Matters:

1. Introductions.
2. **Adoption of Agenda.**
3. **Jennifer Sommerfeld,** **Government Relations Director, Department of Children, Youth, and Families:** Legislative Update and 2026 Legislative Preview, co-presented with Heidi Ombisa Skallet.
4. **Michelle Seymore, Director, Child Safety and Permanency, Department of Children, Youth, and Families:** Child Safety and Permanency Division Organizational Breakdown, co-presented with Windy Ross.
5. **Adjournment**  
   With no further discussion, Juan Linares, chair of the meeting’s sponsoring advisory board, adjourned the meeting at 5:42 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Katie Heilman

Int. Office Administrative Specialist, Office Manager

## Introduction and Adoption of Agenda

1. Juan Linares introduced the board members who were present.
2. Glenda Rooney moved to approve the agenda, and Jesús Villaseñor seconded. The motion was carried.

## Jennifer Sommerfeld, Government Relations Director, and Heidi Ombisa Skallet, Legislative & Policy Coordinator, Child Safety & Permanency, Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF)

1. Context for the 2025 Legislative Session: This was a budget setting year, and there was the odd situation with the tied House of Representatives and power sharing agreement.
   1. Focus to address fraud, waste, and abuse, which created the Centralized Office of the Inspector General.
   2. Focus on savings, and minimal spending. There is a looming deficit in 2028-29.
2. Mandated Reporter Training
   1. Amends MN Statutes 2024, section 260E.065
   2. Adds requirements for training content and length.
   3. Adds requirements for expert input on training development.
3. Judiciary and Public Safety Omnibus: This adds the definition of fentanyl to child neglect. No person may knowingly cause or permit children to use it. This is effective August 1, 2025, and applies to crimes committed on or after that date. It is considered an environmental hazard component.
4. Budget Provisions: hearing on Social Services Information System (SSIS) modernization. This provides $35 million in state funding. This is a critical need given the failure of SSIS to support child welfare work adequately. $10 million of these funds are a dedication of existing funds in the Children and Families Information Technology Innovation Fund.
5. No-Cost Budget Provisions
   1. Allows DCYF and Tribes receiving Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) grants to jointly develop and appropriate reporting schedule rather than having one spelled out in statute.
   2. Eliminates cap on Special Focus Grants for Tribes
   3. Expands use of funding for Public Private Permanency Collaboration to allow provision of services related to kinship rather than adoption only as is currently the case.
6. Policy-Only Provisions
   1. Makes various technical and housekeeping changes to statutes so they are more aligned with policies.
   2. Allows counties and tribes to provide a prevention response to educational neglect reports prior to a child protection response. This is a new provision, as educational neglect had been a “gray area.”
   3. Requires a court report and review 90 days prior to a child in foster care turning age 18 to inform the court of the youth’s intentions and to ensure all needs or services have been addressed. It used to be 180 days prior.
   4. Modifies definition of neglect in Chapter 260E to exclude kids remaining in emergency care settings. There was concern by advocate groups that screening guidelines weren’t being followed. People’s children were boarding in hospitals, but if there was no safe place for them to go, they were being threatened with child protection reporting.
      1. Board member Glenda Rooney asked for clarification on the specific changes in these policies.
      2. Board Chair Juan Linares asked what resources there are for children aging out of foster care. One of the challenges is the loss of services and resources. The 90-day report gives youth who are about to age out notice of what will happen and what their options are if they don’t want to do extended foster care.
         1. Ombudsperson Gubasta asked who the extended foster care specialist is at DCYF: Nick Vogel, who reports to Deb Beske Brown.
   5. Modifies Chapter 142B to expand the definition of related individuals and flexibility around relative foster care licensing requirements to include important friends and family.
      1. Reduces annual training requirements from 12 to 6 hours.
      2. Provides additional 30 days after licensure to complete and document certain trainings.
      3. Requires relative search notice provided when children enter foster care.
   6. Clarifies the local agency’s role in responding to out-of-state child maltreatment allegations involving Minnesota residents.
   7. Requires physicians to provide education to primary caregivers of infants 6 months and younger on recognizing and reporting signs of physical abuse. These signs can be more challenging to identify. This is meant for parents/caregivers to see issues if their children are in childcare centers.
7. 2026 Legislative Preview
   1. Second year of the biennium will have a policy and bonding focus.
      1. There is a chance for a possible supplementary budget due to changes at the federal level.
   2. There is an anticipated deficit in 2028-29.
   3. There will once again be a closely divided legislature.
   4. All constitutional officers and legislative seats are up for election in 2026.
   5. Proposal development at DCYF
      1. Policy focus on efficiency and implementation of recent legislation.
      2. As of now there is no clarity on whether or not there will be a supplemental budget.
      3. Proposal ideas under discussion:
         1. Likely annual technical fixes and policy clarifications
         2. Adding fentanyl to 260E aligning with meth exposure based on session law change from 2025
         3. Minnesota African American Family Preservation and Child Welfare Disproportionality Act (MAAFPACWDA) updates: statewide implementation starts in 2027. DCYF is monitoring potential changes and working with the statewide working group and community partners.
      4. DCYF legislative timeline: proposal development is a year-round focus.

## Michelle Seymore, Director, Child Safety and Permanency; and Windy Ross, Director, Training and Prevention, Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF)

1. CSP Co-Director Program Oversight
   1. Child Safety and Permanency Organizational Chart shared
      1. Windy Ross handles Training and development of staff within child protection, and Prevention development.
      2. Michelle Seymore handles Foster Care and Permanency; she started in June.
         1. Marvin Davis is the deputy director and reports to Michelle Seymore.
         2. American Indian Well-Being Unit, African American Well-Being Unit, grant work, kinship and adoption, all fall under Foster Care and Permanency.
   2. Scope of work for MAAFPACWDA
      1. Wellbeing Unit
         1. Director: Michelle Seymore
         2. Includes technical assistance and case consultations, the African American Child Well-Being Advisory Council, data monitoring & analysis, service coordination, and grants.
      2. Shared Scopes: Collaborative Work Areas
         1. Training & Workforce Development
         2. County Support & Technical Assistance
         3. Data & Strategic Planning
         4. Advisory Council & Working Group
         5. Public Communication & Engagement
      3. Implementation Unit
         1. Director: Windy Ross
         2. Includes the Statewide Working Group, county implementation support, and community engagement & public communication.
   3. Co-Director Agreement and Key Decision-Making Authority
      1. The co-directors commit to a collaborative leadership model that ensures equitable decision-making while maintaining clear accountability and alignment with the Commissioner of Human Services’ directives under MAAFPACWDA.
      2. Collaboration across divisions can serve as a model for county collaboration.
      3. The co-directors will apply a consensus-based approach to all major decisions affecting operations, policy development, case review protocols, and strategic initiatives.
         1. When a consensus can’t be reached, they will seek guidance from partners, commissioners, and designated representatives to ensure alignment.
         2. This will allow for aligned messaging to the counties.
   4. Questions and Comments
      1. Ombudsperson Gubasta: When will MAAFPACWDA roll out for all of Minnesota? Legislation requires readiness by January 1, 2027. Other counties have expressed interest in a phase-in process, but there is no specific plan yet.
      2. Ombudsperson Hill brought up concerns about a recent community information session related to MAAFPACWDA that was canceled with very little communication. She and Ombudsperson Gubasta would like to meet with Windy Ross to discuss options for improving community communications to prevent future issues.
      3. Board Chair Juan Linares echoed the need for community engagement and would like to continue collaboration efforts.

## The meeting adjourned at 5:42 p.m.