

**Citizens' Review Board for Children**

**Children in Out-of-Home Placement  
Annual Report**

**2001**

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**





# Citizens' Review Board for Children

May 20, 2002

Dear Speaker Taylor and President Miller:

The Citizens' Review Board for Children (CRBC) is pleased to provide you with its 2001 Annual Report. I am proud to be one of 350 volunteers who work to assure children can live in a safe and supportive family environment. During fiscal year 2001, CRBC's volunteers conducted over 8,000 case reviews as well as worked with local officials, judges, and legislators to advance children's best interest. The findings and recommendations in this report are a tribute to the efforts and hard work of our dedicated volunteers.

The 2001 Annual Report includes factors that impact the length of stay for children in out-of-home placement, including resources needed to effectively and efficiently address parental substance abuse and to complete the adoption process. Maryland is, however, making progress towards placing children in safe and permanent homes as shown in the 852 adoptions finalized during fiscal year 2001.

This report provides an update to recommendations made in our 1999 Annual Report for improving safety, well-being, and permanence for children in out-of-home placement. Activities to support achievement of many of the recommendations are being planned or implemented. I am very encouraged with the growing collaboration between CRBC and our advocacy partners in the Coalition to Protect Maryland's Children and the Maryland Children's Action Network, as well as with DHR and the local departments of social services. A major barrier is the lack of financial resources that are needed to fund child welfare casework staff and substance abuse treatment for parents.

As you read our 2001 Annual Report, please keep the children and our citizen volunteers at the forefront of your thoughts.

Sincerely,



Ted Kirk  
State Board Chairperson



## THE CITIZENS' REVIEW BOARD FOR CHILDREN

The Citizens' Review Board for Children (CRBC) is mandated by §§ 5-535 through 5-549 of the Family Law Article. Since 1980, over 2,000 citizens have volunteered with CRBC to review individual cases and make recommendations regarding permanency for over 30,000 children in out-of-home placement. Currently, CRBC has over 350 volunteers serving on 62 review boards that provide citizen oversight for Maryland's out-of-home placement system. An additional 167 volunteers along with 103 agency representatives serve on 24 review panels responsible for providing oversight for the child protection system. Both review boards and review panels function in an advisory capacity to the courts, local department of social services (LDSS) and other child welfare agencies.

Ten volunteers elected by local board members and one gubernatorial appointee serve on the State Board which meets up to 10 times per year to set policy and monitor CRBC's activities. During fiscal year 2001, volunteers contributed over 25,000 hours through individual case reviews, advocacy activities, oversight, development of reports, and participation in training.

The Code of Maryland Regulation (COMAR) .07.06.01 requires CRBC to report annually on the status of children in out-of-home placement and to make recommendations for system improvement. The 2001 Annual Report is divided into two sections.

### SECTION I: A PROFILE OF MARYLAND'S CHILDREN IN OUT-OF-HOME PLACEMENT

Child welfare data from fiscal year 2001 are compared with data from fiscal years 1991 and 2000 to show a ten-year and one-year trend. Factors that influence case flow (entries, length of stay, and exits) for Maryland's out-of-home placement population are also presented at both the State and jurisdictional levels. Data from the 1990 and 2000 census reports help provide a contextual framework. This section shows Maryland has varying levels of change in its out-of-home placement population.

#### 2000 Census Data for Maryland

- According to the 2000 census report, Baltimore, Montgomery, and Prince George's counties and Baltimore City have 59% of Maryland's population including children under 18. These jurisdictions also have over 80% of the out-of-home placement population, with Baltimore City having 65%.
- Case flow data and demographics for children in out-of-home placement will be greatly influenced by the four largest jurisdiction especially Baltimore City.

**Since 1980 over 2,000 volunteers have conducted case reviews for over 30,000 children in out-of-home placement.**

**During FY 01, CRBC's volunteers contributed over 25,000 hours on behalf of Maryland's children.**

**This report compares child welfare data for 2001 with data from 2000 and 1991.**

**65% of children in out-of-home placement live in Baltimore City.**

## A PROFILE OF MARYLAND'S CHILDREN IN OUT-OF-HOME PLACEMENT (continued)

### Profile of Maryland's Out-of-Home Placement Population

- Between 1991 and 2001, there was an:
  - 83% increase in the out-of-home population with 6,780 children in 1991 and 12,432 children in 2001;
  - 600% increase in the documentation of parental substance abuse as a case factor;
  - 188% increase in the number of sibling groups;
  - 100% increase in the African-American population; and
  - 111% increase for children entering care between the ages of 5-11 and a 76% increase for children entering under 5 years of age which suggests that the entry population is getting older.
- Neglect was the predominant reason children entered care in Fiscal Years 1991, 2000, and 2001.

### Exit Activity

- During FY 1991, 2000, and 2001, reunification was the primary exit reason for children who left placement within the first six months of an episode.
- During FY 2001, 852 adoptions were finalized; a 23% increase over FY 2000. Baltimore City was responsible for finalizing 60% of the FY 2001 adoptions.
  - Children entering care under five years of age had the most potential to be adopted.
  - In Baltimore City, it took an average of 5 years to progress from entry into out of home placement to final adoption. For Baltimore, Prince George's and Montgomery counties the adoption process took about 3 ½ years. Two major barriers to expediting the adoption process are the need for more legal resources and slow completion of the home study process.

### Length of Stay

- Statewide, the average length of stay for children leaving placement in FY01 was 26 months. The projected average length of stay (includes all children who were in out-of-home placement during the fiscal year) was 35 months.
- Children residing in kinship care often have long stays. Their prospects for legal permanence are poor because relatives are unable or resistant to adopt.

**Between 1991-2001:**

**The out-of-home population increased by 83%;**

**Parental substance abuse as a case factor increased by 600%.**

**852 adoptions were finalized during FY01 of which 60% were in Baltimore City.**

**After a child enters care, the average time to finalize an adoption ranges from 3 1/2 to 5 years.**

**Children in kinship care have longer lengths of stay than children in non-relative placements.**

## A PROFILE OF MARYLAND'S CHILDREN IN OUT-OF-HOME PLACEMENT (continued)

- Time in care will influence the ability to be placed in a permanent home. For children who entered out-of-home placement in 1997 and 1998, an average of 40% were placed in permanent homes within a year of entry, 11% were placed in a permanent home during the third year in placement, and approximately 34% have remained in placement for more than 3 years.

### Measurements of Case Flow Activity

While CRBC and SSA share similar goals and objectives related to children in out-of-home placement, variations in measurements result in different reported outcomes for length of stay and re-entry rates.

#### SSA and Federal Measures

SSA has adopted mandated federal measures to report on child welfare outcomes. For Maryland, these measures show that during FY01:

- 62.8% of children were re-united with parents or relatives less than 12 months after entry into out-of-home placement; the national standard is 76.2%;
- 12.5% of children who exited foster care through adoption did so within 24 months of entry; the national standard is 32.0%; and
- 11.9% of children re-entered out-of-home placement within 12 months of a prior episode; the national standard is 8.6%.

#### CRBC Measures

CRBC questions the impact of the national child welfare standards on permanency planning activities.

- The time frames may create a disincentive for achieving permanency beyond the 12 months for reunification and 24 months for adoption; and
- The 12-month time frame for reunification may place pressure to return children home prematurely especially in light of the parental substance abuse recovery process which often involves relapses. This may jeopardize the children's safety as well as raise the re-entry rates.

CRBC uses the following measurements to track child welfare outcomes with exits during FY 2001 showing the following results:

- 80.6% of children were reunited with family; placed with caretaker who was awarded guardianship, or legally adopted.

**34% of children who entered care in FY 97 have remained in care for more than 3 years**

**SSA has adopted mandatory federal child welfare measures that focus on the percentage of children who exit care through reunification within 12-months of entry and adoption within 24 months.**

**CRBC questions whether the federal time frames for achieving permanency could serve as a disincentive to achieving permanency for cases that require a longer period.**

## A PROFILE OF MARYLAND'S CHILDREN IN OUT-OF-HOME PLACEMENT (continued)

- 46% of the children who exited to a permanent placement did so within 12 months of entry; and
- 10% of children re-entered placement within one year of leaving placement.

### Citizen Review Process

- 8,336 citizen reviews were conducted during FY01.
  - 21% of the reviews were attended by an Interested Party (e.g., biological and foster families, and educational and health providers) other than the caseworker; and
  - approximately 21,000 letters were mailed with the boards findings and recommendations on behalf of the children reviewed.
- The citizen review boards:
  - voted not to file for termination of parental rights in 63% of the eligible cases because there was a compelling reason not to file.
  - concurred with 93% of the permanency plans with 80% agreement for plans to return home, 91% agreement for relative placement; 98% agreement for adoption; and 99% agreement for independent living;
  - found the local department of social services did not use safety protocols in 2% of the reviews; of these, risk was indicated in 61% of the cases.
  - found progress toward achieving placement adequate in 89% of the cases reviewed with 85% adequate progress on plans for return home; 88% for relative placement plans; 86% for adoption plans; and 99% for independent living plans.

**For FY 01 exits, CRBC's measures show 80.6% of children had desired permanency outcomes; and**

**46% of children exited to a permanent placement within 12 months of entry.**

**The Review Boards voted not to file for TPR in 63% of eligible cases.**

**The Review Boards agreed less with plans for return home (80%) than with other permanency plans.**

## SECTION II: CRBC'S LEGISLATIVE AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

This section reports on progress made towards achieving the recommendations made in CRBC's 1999 Annual report related to efforts to improve safety, well-being, and permanence for Maryland's children in out-of-home placement. Selected CRBC recommendations for FY 2002 and 2003 are provided. Information is presented through February 2002.

**Inadequate progress was found in 15% of plans of return home and 14% of plans for adoption.**

## SECTION II: CRBC'S LEGISLATIVE AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS (continued)

### Parental Substance Abuse

- In September 2001, the Secretaries of the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene and the Department of Human Resources completed a Memorandum of Agreement to implement HB 7/SB 671 Integration of Child Welfare and Substance Abuse Treatment Services.
- Training of child welfare staff and addiction specialists at the local departments has begun. A four-year plan has been developed to deploy 81 addiction specialists within the LDSS.
- By May 2002, DHR plans to issue a policy on the circumstances under which LDSS may petition a court ordered substance abuse assessment for parents and children.

**CRBC recommends that policies and procedures related to HB7/Senate Bill 671 be expeditiously developed and widely disseminated to child welfare staff, addiction specialists, the legal community, and the treatment community.**

### Kinship Care

- The Social Services Administration's (SSA) Kinship Care Multidisciplinary Team developed a strategic plan that includes a mandatory training program for kinship care providers. Implementation of the program is scheduled for October 2002.
- As of October 2001, the Subsidized Guardianship Waiver Program has paid subsidies on behalf of 252 children living under kinship care and results are positive.

**CRBC recommends that the experimental Subsidized Guardianship Waiver Program be fully implemented.**

### Adoption

- SSA and the Foster Court Improvement Committee have initiatives to decrease the time to finalize adoptions including TPR mediation programs for Baltimore City and Prince George's County.
- 1,286 children are legally free for adoption. SSA's adoption goal for FY 02 is 850 finalized adoptions and 900 finalized adoptions for FY 03.

**CRBC recommends SSA increase the annual adoption goal equal to the number of children legally free.**

**Proposed activities to implement HB7/SB671 include:**

**Placement of 81 addiction specialists within LDSS; and**

**Policy development on mandatory drug testing for parents.**

**SSA has implemented or planned a variety of programs that provide much needed resources to kinship care providers.**

**1,286 children are legally free for adoption.**

**SSA's adoption goal for FY 2002 is 850 finalized adoptions.**

## CRBC'S LEGISLATIVE AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS (continued)

### Independent Living

- Children who enter care at age 11 or above are more likely to exit through independent living.
- Of the 1,569 teenagers who received independent living services, 53% had documented special needs.
- A training program on available independent living services has been designed for child welfare advocates including kinship care providers.

**CRBC recommends that SSA publish data on children who received and who did not receive independent living services including data on age at entry, gender, abilities, disabilities, and the type of services received.**

### Case Management and Case Load Reduction

- SSA's has developed a strategic plan that includes training staff on cultural competency issues.
- CRBC and SSA collaborated on a project to document court or administrative reviews which resulted in 90% of cases in Baltimore City having accurate review data. This helped SSA to pass, for the first time, the data element "date of most recent periodic review" in the federal Adoption and Foster Care Reporting System (AFCRS).
- The State's current hiring freeze could limit SSA's ability to protect Maryland's children in out-of-home placement.

**CRBC recommends that the Governor exempt all child welfare positions from the hiring freeze, rather than child protective services only.**

### ASFA Related Outcomes

- CRBC and SSA have been meeting quarterly to focus on issues related to achieving permanency.

**CRBC recommends that representatives from the legal community join the quarterly meetings between CRBC and SSA.**

### Judicial Workloads

**CRBC recommends that Chief Judge Bell request sufficient resources in the 2004 budget to address issues related to delays in the TPR and adoption process.**

**More than 50% of teenagers who received independent living services had documented special needs.**

**The State's hiring freeze has limited SSA's ability to fill critical child welfare positions, which if left vacant could jeopardize the safety, well-being, and permanence for children in out-of-home placement.**

**SSA and CRBC are meeting regularly to discuss ASFA related outcomes**

**Sufficient legal resources are needed to reduce delays in the adoption process**



## PROPOSED ACTIVITIES TO IMPROVE CHILD WELFARE OUTCOMES

This report illustrates that CRBC's 1999 recommendations to improve safety, well-being, and permanence for Maryland's children remain very relevant. Issues such as parental substance abuse and lack of resources to expeditiously finalize adoptions continue to present critical barriers in the permanency planning process. The impact of a jurisdiction's population, resources, and child welfare policies and practices will also impact the permanency planning process.

Maryland is making progress towards achieving its child welfare goals. Entries, re-entries, and total out-of-home population continued to decline. Finalized adoptions increased dramatically. While SSA and CRBC use different methods to measure re-entry rates, length of stay, and other child welfare activities that may result in statistical discrepancies, both agencies agree on the broad trend lines.

A range of proposed and planned programs and activities to improve child welfare outcomes in Maryland are presented in this report. Consistent themes are suggested.

- Strategic planning activities have involved a broad spectrum of stakeholders, and will benefit from expanded partnerships including parents and guardians.
- Staff and caregiver training are being incorporated as a core component of SSA's strategic plans. Staff training is needed in other areas including training to effectively implement HB7/SB 671.
- Development and dissemination of policies and procedures to all stakeholders need aggressive implementation.
- Published reports on child welfare outcomes must be data-driven and results-oriented. These results must be communicated to the entire child welfare community, including front line staff.
- A comprehensive approach must be used to address the complex issues related to improving safety, well-being and permanency for children. For example, plans of adoption will not be expeditiously achieved without necessary legal and adoptive resources.

This report concurs with the guiding principle established in the federal Child Welfare Outcomes 1998 Report that states child welfare outcomes cannot be linked exclusively to the operations of the child welfare agency. Section II identifies a variety of other stakeholders that must be included in improving child welfare outcomes including legislators, judiciary, mental health community, parents, guardians/caregivers, and the general community. CRBC's 2002 Annual Report will provide a final update on progress towards achieving its 1999 recommendations.

**While CRBC and SSA use different measures to assess child welfare outcomes, both agencies agree on the broad trend lines.**

**Continued progress towards achieving child welfare goals requires coordination, communication, and evaluation activities involving many stakeholders.**

**A strategic focus must incorporate factors that are within and outside the direct scope of SSA.**

**The final report on the status of CRBC's 1999 recommendations will be presented in its 2002 Annual Report.**

## CHILD WELFARE WEBSITES

- Advocates for Children and Youth <http://www.acy.org/>
- American Academy of Pediatrics for Maryland <http://www.mdaap.org/>
- Annie E. Casey Foundation <http://www.aecf.org/>
- Arizona Foster Care Review Board <http://www.supreme.state.az.us/fcrb/>
- Center on Budget and Policy Priorities <http://www.cbpp.org/>
- Child Welfare League of America <http://www.cwla.org/>
- Children's' Defense Fund <http://www.childrensdefensefund.org/>
- Citizens' Review Board for Children <http://www.dhr.state.md.us/crbc>
- Community Organizations in <http://www.somd.lib.md>
- Department of Health and Mental Hygiene <http://www.dhmf.state.md.us/>
- Department of Human Resources <http://www.dhr.state.md.us/>
- MARFY <http://marfy.myassociation.com/my/shared/home.jsp>
- Maryland CASA <http://www.marylandcasa.org/whatwedo.htm>
- Maryland Electronic Capitol <http://www.mec.state.md.us/>
- Maryland General Assembly <http://mlis.state.md.us/>
- Maryland Governor <http://www.gov.state.md.us/>
- Maryland Kids' Page <http://www.sos.state.md.us/sos/kids/html/kidhome.html>
- Maryland Office for Children, Youth & Families <http://www.ocyf.state.md.us/index0.htm>
- National Association of Child Advocates <http://www.childadvocacy.org/>
- National Center on Children in Poverty <http://cpmcnet.columbia.edu/dept/nccp>
- New Mexico Citizen Review Board <http://www.nmcrb.org/>
- SAILOR: Maryland's Public Information Network <http://www.sailor.lib.md.us/>
- Self-Help On Rural Economics & Urban Problem <http://www.shoreup.org/>

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