



Maria Mossaides, Director
Office of the Child Advocate
One Ashburton Place
Boston, MA 02108

8 August 2022 via email

Dear Director Mossaides,

It is with great concern for children in the Commonwealth's care that we reach out to you. We have been hearing for months now that there are children DCF is taking into care who are sleeping in DCF offices due to the dearth of available placements across the state. We are hearing this from other child and family advocates, service providers, former and current DCF employees and attorneys. We are also hearing that DCF is moving some children nightly from one emergency placement to another and often these children end up in inappropriate placements. The voices of those sharing this information with us are getting louder and more frequent. Yet, we are not hearing anything from leaders of the child welfare system about this concern or a plan to address this urgent issue. The placement issue has been a recurring problem for many years that appears to be escalating and it is unclear how it will improve in the short-term. At the start of and throughout the pandemic, child welfare leadership in this state warned of an increase in the number of abuse/neglect cases and raised the alarm about the increasing rate of mental health issues for children, youth and young adults as the state emerged from the pandemic shutdown. Yet, the system seems to be caught completely unprepared.

We are sharing what we are hearing and what sounds to us like an emergency requiring quick and decisive action; we assume this is not news to you.

If what we are hearing is the reality for children who the Commonwealth has taken from their homes to keep them safe, yet there are few appropriate placements in which to keep them safe, we believe this is a child welfare emergency. We are all aware of the short- and long-term harm to children, youth, and young adults who must endure inappropriate and/or multiple placements. Moving an already traumatized child from place to place is a trauma in and of itself.

We assume you are aware of a placement crisis at DCF. We have a few basic questions:

- What data/information does the OCA have about this current emergency?
- What planning was done in response to your office's warnings during the pandemic regarding the potential increase in the number of abuse/neglect reports and the incidence of child/youth mental health issues?
- What is the OCA doing to address this current emergency? Is the OCA working with DCF to address this issue?
- What data and information regarding this urgent issue are available publicly?

We are available to assist in any way that we can, and we assume that other advocates will be as well. We, and the public, need to understand the problem, the risks to the children we are all responsible for, what the child welfare system is doing to address this crisis, and what we can all do to help.

Sincerely,

Jane Lyons, Executive Director

June D. Ameen, Policy Director