



**Department of Children and Youth
Response to the 2025 Ohio Citizen Review Panel
Annual Report and Recommendations
December 2025**

The Ohio State University (OSU) is contracted to administer Ohio’s Citizen Review Panels (CRPs), which assess the impact of child protective services (CPS) policies and practices and contribute to public outreach and transparency. The CRP program is mandated by the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA), and the Department of Children and Youth (DCY) values the critical role these panels play in strengthening Ohio’s child welfare system.

DCY has reviewed the 2025 Annual CRP Report and extends its appreciation to panel members for their commitment, analysis, and thoughtful recommendations. Over the past year, DCY has advanced its mission to support children, families, and communities through a more integrated, prevention-focused, and data-informed approach. With the consolidation of early childhood programs, family support services, and child protective services under one department, families now benefit from streamlined access, coordinated care, and clearer pathways to needed supports.

In 2024–2025, DCY’s work has centered on implementation and accountability. The department has launched and expanded several major initiatives, including the Maternal and Infant Vitality Initiative [Maternal and Infant Vitality Initiative | Department of Children and Youth](#), statewide Home Visiting Regional Conferences, the addition of new Warm Handoff Specialists to support transition-age youth, and the enhancement of Qualified Residential Treatment Program (QRTP) [Qualified Residential Treatment Program \(QRTP\) | Department of Children and Youth](#) monitoring tools. In addition, House Bill 315 [HB 315](#) established significant new responsibilities for residential oversight, monthly well-being contacts, and placement review requirements that reinforce DCY’s commitment to youth safety, voice, and rights protections.

DCY has also deepened its data integration efforts by connecting home visiting, early intervention, child welfare, early childhood education, and youth transition data to improve statewide assessments of well-being, prevention, and service effectiveness. These efforts, combined with the ongoing work of the federal Children and Family Services Review (CFSR) Round 4 Statewide Assessment, continue to inform policy decisions and guide system improvement across Ohio.

The department appreciates the CRPs’ continued partnership and accountability and remains committed to thoughtfully addressing each recommendation through collaborative planning and the ongoing implementation of DCY initiatives statewide.

NORTHWEST PANEL

(NW) Recommendation #1 – The panel recommends DCY broaden the measurement framework for child well-being in Ohio CCWIS to include holistic indicators such as emotional well-being, comfort in the home environment, attachment, and communication with caregivers.

DCY Response

Ohio's Comprehensive Assessment Planning Model (CAPM) [When is Safety Assessed? | Department of Children and Youth](#) outlines criteria and tools used by caseworkers to assess safety, risk, and well-being. Using the Strengths and Needs Assessment tool, caseworkers evaluate multiple factors impacting child well-being, including physical, cognitive, social, emotional, and behavioral development. The tool also prompts assessment of family dynamics like roles, interactions, relationships and connections to extended relatives, community, and social supports. These holistic elements are embedded in the CAPM model to provide a comprehensive understanding of child and family well-being and facilitate linkage to necessary resources.

For example, DCY hosted recent Help Me Grow regional conferences, which convened over 350 professionals, emphasized trauma-informed care, used breakout sessions on data-driven measurement of home-visiting outcomes, and strengthened collaboration with children services agencies.

DCY continues to align its practice framework with the federal expectations outlined in the Children's Bureau's Child Welfare Policy Manual [Child Welfare Policy Manual | Child Welfare Policy Manual](#) and the Child Welfare Information Gateway guidance on well-being.

Recent statutory changes under House Bill 315 require custodial agencies to conduct monthly in-person well-being visits for children placed in residential facilities and to initiate formal placement reviews within two business days when concerns arise. These requirements generate consistent data on well-being, safety, and rights conditions that can be incorporated into broader child well-being measurement frameworks under CAPM and Ohio's CCWIS.

Additionally, DCY announced new Qualified Residential Treatment Program (QRTP) monitoring tools in April 2025 designed to strengthen agency compliance and oversight of congregate care settings, an important context for expanding youth exit interviews from residential care.

In addition, DCY's Division of Training, Technical Assistance, and Practice [Children Services Professionals Training and Development | Department of Children and Youth](#) will share CRP's feedback with statewide training vendors and technical assistance providers to strengthen caseworker skill-building related to assessing and documenting well-being in Ohio's CCWIS.

The safety assessment updates into Ohio's CCWIS have been prioritized for SFY 2026-2027.

This division's ongoing work through the Ohio Child Welfare Training Program (OCWTP) [Children Services Professionals Training and Development | Department of Children and Youth](#) includes training modules that emphasize trauma-informed engagement and holistic approaches to assessing the well-being of families and children.

Over the past year, DCY also launched several related initiatives that expand the department's focus on emotional and relational well-being:

- **Educational Stability for Foster Youth Initiative (June 2025)** – new policies now require schools and PCSAs to collaborate within five days of placement to ensure continuity in education and support children's sense of belonging.
- **OhioRISE and Behavioral Health Integration Efforts** – DCY continues its partnership with Ohio Medicaid to align mental and behavioral health supports for multi-system youth, improving cross-system data sharing and coordinated service delivery.
- **Home Visiting Regional Conferences and Early Intervention Family Engagement Efforts** – these forums have elevated trauma-informed care, parent-child bonding, and family engagement strategies that directly strengthen child well-being outcomes.

Collectively, these initiatives reinforce DCY's commitment to a holistic framework for assessing and supporting child well-being in Ohio.

(NW) Recommendation #2 - Expand the use of kinship caregivers as approved respite providers to preserve family connections and support placement stability, a key indicator of well-being for young people and kinship caregivers.

DCY Response

DCY values and encourages continued relationships between children in care and their relatives. The department is actively building a least restrictive continuum of care that strengthens and supports kinship caregivers from the earliest point of agency involvement. During safety planning, county agencies are encouraged to prioritize placement with relatives whenever a parent is temporarily unable to provide care, minimizing the need for court involvement and preserving existing family connections.

When out-of-home placement is necessary, the Kinship Support Program (KSP) [KinshipSupportProgramFAQ.pdf](#) offers stipends to help maintain children's stability and well-being in kinship settings. For caregivers assuming long-term or permanent placements, the Kinship Guardianship Assistance Program (KGAP) [Kinship Guardianship Assistance Program | Department of Children and Youth](#) provides financial support and potential Medicaid coverage until the child turns 18, and in some cases up to age 21. The Kinship Permanency Incentive Program (KPIP) [Kinship | Department of Children and Youth](#) further assists

caregivers with legal custody or guardianship by providing time-limited incentive payments, which may be combined with Ohio Works First [Cash assistance | Department of Children and Youth](#) “child-only” benefits.

House Bill 315 also introduced new oversight and documentation requirements for residential settings, which further support DCY’s efforts to strengthen family-based placement stability. Increased monitoring, mandatory placement reviews, and improved reporting pathways enhance DCY’s ability to identify opportunities where kinship caregivers may serve as stabilizing supports, including respite, when consistent with safety standards and federal requirements.

DCY recognizes the value of using kinship caregivers as respite providers and will review current approval processes to identify opportunities for alignment and flexibility within existing certification standards. This work is supported by the development of the new Kinship Certification, aligned with national recommendations, that features less restrictive requirements than foster care. Once implemented, this certification will also allow Title IV-E reimbursement for eligible youth and help expedite access to KGAP.

In support of transition-age services, DCY launched Warm Handoff Specialists in nine counties to support youth exiting foster care and moving into independent living or Bridges.

In addition, the Ohio Kinship and Adoption Navigator (OhioKAN) [OhioKAN - Kinship & Adoption Navigator](#) program, now operating statewide, provides hands on navigation, flexible funds, and benefits coordination for kinship families, including those serving as respite supports for one another. Together, these efforts advance DCY’s commitment to reducing trauma, strengthening family bonds, supporting reunification, and enhancing the overall well-being of children in kinship care.

(NW) Recommendation #3 - Conduct a comprehensive study of existing services and programs currently provided by local PCSAs that enhance child well-being or meet a child’s well-being needs.

DCY Response

DCY appreciates the panel’s recommendation and agrees that understanding the full range of services offered by local Public Children Services Agencies (PCSAs) is essential to improving outcomes for children and families. As part of Round 4 of Ohio’s Statewide Assessment for the Federal Child and Family Services Review (CFSR), the state conducted a comprehensive evaluation of its service array and resource development. The findings, detailed in the Statewide Assessment report, identify strengths, gaps, and opportunities for improvement in how services enhance child safety, permanency, and well-being.

If the assessment identifies the service array as a strength, Ohio will prioritize strategies to maximize its use across all counties. If gaps are identified, DCY will incorporate corrective actions into its Program Improvement Plan (PIP) to strengthen statewide service delivery. The report is located at [Ohio CFSR Statewide Assessment](#).

Related statewide initiatives, such as the Maternal and Infant Vitality Initiative and recent Home Visiting Regional Conferences, also inform DCY's understanding of service array strengths by connecting prevention, family support, and CPS partners around shared well-being outcomes.

In addition, DCY continues to analyze service effectiveness through other initiatives, such as the OhioKAN program evaluation, technical assistance from the Division of Training, Technical Assistance, and Practice, and feedback from the OCWTP. Insights from these efforts will help inform how DCY and county partners address the CRPs recommendation and ensure alignment with ongoing CFSR improvement planning.

CENTRAL PANEL

(C) Recommendation #1 - To improve the timeliness, consistency, and clarity of responses to Citizen Review Panel (CRP) recommendations, DCY in collaboration with CRPs should develop and utilize a standardized response template. This template could require the following fields to be completed for each recommendation:

a. Name(s) of the assigned staff or units responsible for the response

b. Summary of initial action

i. Accepted (The department agrees with the recommendation and will proceed with a plan for implementation)

ii. Accepted with Modifications (The department supports the recommendation in principle but plans modifications based on feasibility, resources, or policy requirements)

iii. Under Review (The department needs more time to assess feasibility, resource impact, or legal/policy implications)

iv. Partially Feasible (Some components of the recommendation are feasible and will be pursued, while others are not [with explanation])

v. Not Feasible at This Time (Due to funding, staffing, regulatory, or other constraints, the department cannot act on the recommendation now [with a clear rationale])

vi. Declined (The department does not plan to implement the recommendation, with a full explanation provided)

c. Brief rationale supporting the action

d. Planned next steps or implementation plan, if applicable.

e. Potential obstacles.

DCY Response

DCY appreciates the Central Panel's recommendation to establish a standardized response format that ensures clarity, timeliness, and accountability in addressing CRP recommendations. The department agrees that a uniform approach will strengthen collaboration and enhance public transparency. DCY will adopt the attached Standardize Response Template beginning in State Fiscal Year (SFY) 2026. The format will be incorporated into future CRP correspondence and will support improved tracking and communication between DCY and all five panels.

(C) Recommendation #2 - To strengthen collaboration and ensure CRP work aligns with agency priorities, DCY should annually provide written input to the CRPs identifying 2-3 topic areas where panel review and recommendations would be most valuable. This input should be provided with the submission of the response to the CRP annual report each year by December 31. This will allow CRPs to incorporate DCY needs into their annual planning processes. Topics could be based on emerging trends, areas needing system improvement, upcoming federal reviews, or internal strategic initiatives. This collaborative approach would support a stronger partnership between DCY and CRPs, enhancing the relevance and usefulness of CRP activities.

DCY Response

DCY appreciates the panel's recommendation and agrees that providing annual written input will strengthen collaboration and ensure CRP efforts align with the department's strategic priorities. As a newly established department, DCY remains focused on its three foundational goals, including positioning Ohio among the top ten states nationally in reducing the rate of children entering foster care. Currently, 3.3 per 1,000 children enter care; DCY's goal is to reduce this rate to 2 per 1,000.

In preparation for the upcoming CRP planning cycle, DCY offers the following priority areas for consideration:

- **Positive Childhood Experiences (PCEs):** DCY recommends the Northwest CRP continue its focus on PCEs as part of a broader strategy to improve child and family well-being and reduce the need for out-of-home placements.
- **Kinship Supports and Stabilization:** In alignment with the Northwest CRP's recommendations, DCY is exploring enhanced support for kinship caregivers, including preventative supports that reduce the likelihood of placement disruptions or removals.

DCY also recommends that the CRPs consider the implementation of House Bill 315 (HB315) as a priority topic for future review, with a specific focus on placement supports and recruitment in counties across central Ohio, spanning from the northern to the southern central regions of the state. These counties have been identified through DCY's Group Home

Regional Map as areas where more residential facility capacity is needed. This determination is based on the number of children and youth in foster care in each region, with the number of residential facilities already certified by DCY in each region. This map is updated quarterly and can be referenced at [Becoming a Certified Agency | Department of Children and Youth](#).

The HB 315 legislation introduced significant new oversight, monitoring, documentation, and youth-safety requirements for PCSAs, PCPAs, and residential facilities. CRP support in assessing implementation fidelity, identifying barriers, and evaluating youth impact would be highly valuable to DCY during the first year of rollout.

These topic areas reflect emerging trends, DCY's strategic goals, and opportunities identified through ongoing system assessments. DCY will continue to provide written input annually, by December 31, to support CRP planning and ensure alignment between state priorities and panel activities.

Additionally, the newly updated DCY website [Department of Children and Youth | Ohio.gov](#) serves as a valuable resource for the CRPs and may help generate opportunities for collaboration aligned with DCY's strategic goals which can also be viewed on the DCY About Us section of the website [About Us | Department of Children and Youth](#).

(C) Recommendation #3 - To improve the engagement with DCY responses, the panel recommends the addition of a standardized portion of the Annual CRP Report submitted to DCY each year in May. This portion would be a reflection on the state response to the prior year's report to Citizen Review Panel (CRP) recommendations. In addition, the panel recommends conducting an annual meeting with DCY to review the response to CRP recommendations to aid in future strategic planning.

DCY Response

DCY supports the recommendation to include a standardized section in the Annual CRP Report that reflects the department's response to the prior year's recommendations. This addition will enhance continuity from year to year and promote clearer alignment between DCY actions and CRP priorities.

The implementation of House Bill 315 will provide substantial new data and operational insights that can further inform these annual discussions. As the legislation requires new reporting, oversight, and review procedures, an annual meeting with CRPs will help ensure both entities have a shared understanding of system needs, early implementation challenges, and opportunities for improvement.

The department also agrees that holding an annual meeting to review the response to the CRP recommendations will enhance collaboration and foster a shared understanding. Establishing a dedicated forum for this review will support joint strategic planning, improve

communication, and help ensure that CRP feedback continues to inform the department's ongoing improvement efforts.

NORTHEAST PANEL

The panel conducted a scientific literature review and an interview with representatives from the Ohio Children's Trust Fund (OCTF) to gain a better understanding of PCEs. Ohio has not yet implemented comprehensive statewide data collection efforts focused on PCEs with child welfare populations, yet several nascent PCE initiatives are being led by OCTF. Given the early stage of this work and the limited infrastructure to support widespread adoption or evaluation of PCEs, the panel is not positioned to make formal recommendations for systemic change at this time.

SOUTHWEST PANEL

Both the Central Ohio CRP and the Southwest Ohio CRP conducted impact projects and arrived at similar conclusions. The Southwest Ohio CRP acknowledges and fully supports the recommendations put forth by the Central Ohio Citizen Review Panel (please see the Central Ohio CRP's Recommendations).

SOUTHEAST PANEL

(SE) Recommendation #1 - Expand the requirement for exit interviews to include youth exiting residential and group home facilities.

Ohio only requires the completion of exit interviews when youth exit a foster family placement. The panel recommends that DCY utilize existing processes to fulfill this recommendation. Exit interviews following a residential or group home placement are an opportunity for youth to provide feedback to PCSAs and ultimately DCY about their experiences in these facilities.

DCY Response

DCY supports expanding exit interviews to include youth leaving residential and group home settings. During the development of outcome measures for the Children Services Transformation (CST) initiative in late 2022, exit interviews were identified as a valuable tool for gathering youth voice. However, internal data revealed a low statewide completion rate of 21%, with participation declining as youth age.

To better understand these barriers, DCY held internal strategy sessions and consulted with the Ohio Youth Advisory Board (OhioYAB) [Youth Voice | Department of Children and Youth](#) in October 2023. Youth provided critical insights, including that:

- Exit interviews should be conversational in nature.

- Many youth did not recall being interviewed upon exiting placements.
- Questions should be asked throughout the placement, not just at the time of transition.
- Monthly visits should include private conversations between caseworkers and youth.
- Exit interviews should be conducted by neutral parties, such as the Youth Ombudsman, not affiliated with the custodial agency.
- Youth should be informed in advance about placement changes.
- Interviews should be conducted upon exit from residential or group home settings.

In April 2025, significant statutory changes under House Bill 315 established new accountability requirements for residential facilities, PCSAs, and PCPAs. These include mandatory monthly in-person visits by custodial agencies to evaluate child well-being, required reporting of rights violations and safety concerns to DCY, and mandated placement reviews within two business days when concerns arise. These new responsibilities strengthen oversight and create additional opportunities to identify facility-level concerns, support youth voice, and improve documentation of rights-related issues.

The law also established notification requirements for emergency department visits, hospital admissions, and law enforcement interactions involving youth in residential facilities. These notifications must be shared with DCY and the custodial agency, creating a new source of real-time information that can support the development of expanded youth reporting systems and follow-up processes.

Additionally, DCY announced new Qualified Residential Treatment Program (QRTP) monitoring tools in April 2025 designed to strengthen agency compliance and oversight of congregate care settings, an important context for expanding youth exit interviews from residential care.

DCY also explored alternative models, including New York City’s annual youth survey, which achieves a 40–60% completion rate using methods such as app-based, phone, or QR code survey tools.

Given the importance of youth voice and the operational considerations involved in expanding the exit interview process, DCY recommends reconvening partners, including OhioYAB, PCSAs, private foster care and congregate care agencies, the Youth Ombudsman, and the Youth Navigator Network (YNN) [Contact Us - Youth Navigator Network](#), to further define this approach. This collaborative process will help ensure that an expanded exit interview requirement is meaningful, feasible, and responsive to the lived experiences of youth-in-care.

(SE) Recommendation #2 - DCY should develop a process for documenting and addressing rights violations that do not rise to the level of abuse or neglect.

DCY Response

DCY agrees that youth should have clear, accessible pathways to report their concerns about their rights, including situations that do not meet the statutory threshold of abuse or neglect. Both Private Network Agencies (PNAs) and Public Children Services Agencies (PCSAs) are required to maintain formal complaint processes, and the updated Foster Care Bill of Rights [Foster Youth Bill of Rights | Department of Children and Youth](#) which is distributed to youth in care to reinforce their understanding of these protections.

Recent changes in House Bill 315 further reinforce the need for consistent documentation of rights violations. Residential facilities and custodial agencies are now required to report potential rights violations, unsafe conditions, and safety concerns identified during monthly visits or placement reviews to DCY within one business day. These new statutory responsibilities provide a framework that can complement an expanded rights-reporting system and improve statewide consistency in how youth concerns are tracked and addressed.

Additionally, the Youth Ombudsman's Office [Youth and Family Ombudsmen Office | Youth and Family Ombudsmen](#) at Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS) provides an independent avenue for youth to report rights-related concerns, seek assistance, and receive an impartial review. This office expands youth access to support outside of their custodial agency and increases transparency and responsiveness across the system.

DCY will continue evaluating opportunities to strengthen documentation and follow-up processes within existing structures to ensure that youth rights concerns are consistently addressed, even when they do not rise to the level of abuse or neglect.

(SE) Recommendation #3 - DCY should engage stakeholders, including youth and young adults, in the development of both the rights violation reporting system and the associated response procedures.

DCY Response

DCY appreciates the panel's emphasis on the importance of engaging youth and young adults in the development of any rights-violation reporting system and related response procedures. Although this work has not yet begun, DCY agrees that individuals with lived experience must be involved in a meaningful and effective process.

Recent changes in House Bill 315 establish multiple new requirements that strengthen accountability and create additional opportunities to engage youth and stakeholders. These include mandated monthly visits in residential facilities, required placement reviews when concerns are identified, and new reporting pathways for injuries, hospitalizations, and law enforcement interactions. These statutory touchpoints can serve as natural opportunities to

gather youth input and ensure stakeholder involvement in the design of an improved rights-reporting system.

To ensure that a future rights reporting system is effective, youth-centered, and responsive, DCY will engage a broad and diverse group of stakeholders in its development. This includes youth and young adults with experience in congregate care, their families, frontline caseworkers and supervisors, licensing specialists, and the Youth and Family Ombudsman. Involving those directly impacted will help ensure that the system reflects real-world challenges, promotes accessibility, and builds trust. DCY will also leverage engagement structures highlighted in recent *Tuesday Times* [Tuesday Times | Department of Children and Youth](#) editions, such as Youth Advisory Board spotlights and Youth Navigator Network updates, to ensure ongoing feedback loops from young people in care.

DCY values collaborative design to strengthen transparency and accountability across residential and group home settings. This approach will help ensure that any reporting processes and response protocols are functional, equitable, trauma-informed and empowering for the youth they intend to serve.

(SE) Recommendation #4 – Consider the addition of Financial Social Work curriculum into CORE training or a required specialist license for those workers serving as independent living coordinators.

DCY Response

DCY appreciates the panel’s focus on strengthening financial literacy preparation for youth in congregate care and those transitioning to adulthood. The department recognizes that gaps in financial knowledge can significantly hinder young people as they move toward independence, and DCY is committed to enhancing both training content and support in this area.

OCWTP continues to build content surrounding financial literacy and daily living skills, and it is a focus in the training curriculum. A review of the training will be completed to assess whether additional information should be added. In addition, “Compliance Chats” for DCY-certified agencies are held on the fourth Tuesday of each month. Their purpose is to update DCY-certified agencies on rule changes, system updates, and other changes that could impact how certified agencies operate. Every month, a presentation focuses on their compliance and best practices, and future chats will focus on congregate care service plans, which will support the Independent Living Plans developed by the PCSAs, as the PCSAs are responsible for Independent Living per the rule. Independent Living and PCSA caseworkers will need to continue to have discussions and monitor the youth's progress on their Independent Living Plans.

The Child and Adult Protective Services Learning Management System (CAPS LMS) [CAPS LMS Info – Ohio CAPS](#) serves as Ohio’s centralized platform for training across the child and adult protective services system, including independent living services. Child welfare workers, independent living coordinators, adult protective services staff, and foster, adoptive, and kinship caregivers use the system to access required training, complete onboarding modules, track certifications, and manage ongoing professional development.

Through existing curricula such as *Supporting Youth Transitioning Out of Care*, *Independent Living and Youth Transitioning Out of Care v2*, and *Nine Essential Connections to Independent Living*, caseworkers and independent living coordinators receive tools to help youth:

- Build knowledge and skills around life planning
- Develop strategies for interdependence and meaningful, supportive relationships
- Understand risks associated with inadequate preparation and the ten essential life skill elements
- Access available resources, programs, and supports

These courses already incorporate components of financial preparation, including planning, saving, and identifying supports.

Congregate care entities also access content through the CAPS LMS, creating a clear pathway to ensure consistent emphasis on financial literacy across providers. DCY will explore integrating “Financial Social Work” principles into existing or updated curricula to expand focus on budgeting, saving, financial decision-making, and long-term financial planning.

House Bill 315 also strengthened oversight of service and discharge planning in residential facilities by requiring caseworkers to conduct monthly in-person visits and review whether facilities are appropriately planning for a youth’s needs, including transition and life-skills development. These new requirements provide additional opportunities to reinforce financial literacy and independence planning during monthly contacts and placement reviews, complementing any enhancements made to Independent Living or financial education curricula.

As part of DCY’s commitment to continuous improvement, the department will review the current independent living curricula within the CAPS LMS and identify opportunities to add modules or supplemental content specifically focused on financial independence. Strengthening this area of training will equip staff to better coach young people and improve the practical preparation for adulthood.

In support of transition-age services, DCY launched Warm Handoff Specialists in nine counties to support youth exiting foster care and moving into independent living or Bridges.

By enhancing financial literacy support, DCY aims to reduce barriers to successful independence and promote stronger long-term well-being for youth transitioning out of congregate care and foster care settings.