

NYS Office of Children and Family Services

Government Transparency Plan

October 13, 2021

Proposed Plan to Expand Transparency

OCFS has undergone a review of the agency’s policies and practices to assess ways that the agency can increase transparency and consider areas in need of improvement. It should be noted that OCFS’s website offers access to a great deal of information, data and published reports. In line with the articulated goals of Governor Kathy Hochul, the charts below, broken out by program division, outline how OCFS will continue to increase transparency and accountability. In addition, we have identified several areas where work is already in process or ongoing.

Making additional information available to the public	
Child Welfare	<p>IN PROCESS/ONGOING:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OCFS is participating in the National State Child Abuse and Neglect (SCAN) Policies Database initiative to promote public awareness of state definitions and policies in reporting and responding to child maltreatment. • OCFS is building a webpage to provide data and information to assist the public, local communities, and local departments of social services in tracking the State’s progress in implementation of the federal Family First Preventive Services Act. • OCFS has already begun posting child fatality reports on our website and will update quarterly. <p>UPCOMING:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OCFS is exploring ways to streamline its licensing webpage for voluntary foster care agencies to create a one-stop shop for resources, licensing documents, manuals, rates, regulations and links to various state systems they are required to use. • OCFS is assessing the feasibility of posting monitoring and oversight reports following reviews of local districts and voluntary foster care agencies.

<p>Child Care</p>	<p>IN PROCESS/ONGOING:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OCFS will soon begin posting weekly COVID infection data for child care programs on its website. • OCFS posts a weekly child care stabilization grant dashboard on its website, showing the total amount of approved grants and amounts disbursed to child care programs statewide. <p>UPCOMING:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OCFS will soon provide information on its website to indicate when a licensed and registered provider has been disqualified from receiving subsidy payments, for example, due to substantiation of fraud. • OCFS already translates all vital child care documents into 11 languages and the IT application for the child care stabilization grants was also translated into 11 languages. OCFS will strive to provide the same level of translation for any new grant opportunities going forward.
<p>Youth Development and Juvenile Justice</p>	<p>UPCOMING:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In the area of youth development, OCFS is finalizing incident data for detention programs statewide to be made available on our website. • OCFS will be posting additional data from the National Youth in Transition Database and well as reporting data regarding youth involved in the juvenile justice system.
<p>Commission for the Blind</p>	<p>ONGOING</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The New York State Commission for the Blind will continue to make sure that all web content is posted in an accessible format. OCFS also strives to make sure that any information sent to employees is provided in an accessible manner. •
<p>General: Policies and Guidance Documents Dashboards Regulations Audit Reports</p>	<p>UPCOMING:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OCFS will continue to work collaboratively with local departments of social services to review and provide feedback on draft administrative directives and policies with statewide impact. • OCFS has begun developing a number of internal dashboards and will work on enhancing capacity of web-based reporting options to support visualizations and interactive dashboards to make data available to the public without requiring the creation of multiple individualized reports.

Timely preparation of legally mandated reporting and ways to make information available to the public	
General	<p>ONGOING:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Once finalized, OCFS posts all mandated reports on its website and notifies relevant stakeholders.
Commission for the Blind	<p>UPCOMING:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The OCFS Commission for the Blind will post and update federal data on their performance metrics.
Use of Project Sunlight Database	
General	<p>ONGOING:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> OCFS will work to ensure that any available refresher training or materials on the reporting requirements of Project Sunlight, as well as the use of the portal, is available for all employees.
FOIL	
General	<p>ONGOING:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> OCFS receives a large volume of requests for records from the Statewide Central Register that are mistakenly requested through the FOIL process. OCFS is working with ITS to develop an automated web-based solution and would allow individuals to request their records electronically and allow OCFS legal to redirect the public to that website. As stated above, OCFS has begun posting child fatality reports on our website. This will significantly reduce the number of FOIL requests for this information. <p>UPCOMING:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> OCFS is examining how to revise or add existing reports to our website to make available frequently requested data and information. This will require approximately a year of development and testing to complete.
Open Data	
General	<p>ONGOING:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> OCFS continues to use OPEN FOIL and publishes numerous documents in the “reading room” section of the website.
Reducing or Eliminating Costs Associated with Providing Data or Records	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">
Updating Records Retention Policy and Timely Transfer to State Archives	

General	<p>ONGOING:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> OCFS recently conducted an agency-wide review of retention records and updated schedules and has been working with State Archives to transfer records according to the appropriate retention schedule. Through this process, OCFS was able to significantly reduce the number of Retention and Disposition Authorizations by over 75% and continues to review regularly.
Increasing Participation of Agency Personnel in Community Events and Avenues for Public Participation	
General	<p>UPCOMING:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> OCFS will expand on its current outreach by conducting public hearings or virtual town hall meetings to better incorporate voices of those with lived experience to hear more from those directly impacted and increase transparency in decision-making. OCFS does this work in smaller settings with stakeholders such as the Parent Advisory Board for parents of youth involved in the child welfare system and the Youth Advisory Board which is made up of youth involved in the foster care system.

Measures of Success and Long-term Monitoring

To assess the implementation of the recommendations above, OCFS will employ a number of strategies. For many of our recommendations, we can monitor the website for an increase in traffic or “hits” to pages. For some of the recommendations that include posting additional data on the website, we hope to see a corresponding decrease in the number of FOIL requests for this information. In particular, FOIL requests for child fatality reports are frequently requested and quite often result in voluminous responses. OCFS legal will monitor these requests and our communications team will monitor the number of hits on our website. Once an electronic solution is in place for requesting records from the Statewide Central Register, OCFS can monitor the online portal as well as the number of FOIL requests coming in for this information. We anticipate seeing a significant reduction in FOIL for these records.

By engaging stakeholders more often, including the local social services districts and the public, we hope to increase engagement and preparedness for new statewide initiatives by the field. While not easily measured, we hope to assess through their feedback.