

NCCPR: Commission studying mandatory child abuse reporting “Failed Job One”

National child advocacy organization releases in-depth analysis of report from Massachusetts Mandatory Reporter Commission

ALEXANDRIA, VIRGINIA, UNITED STATES, July 12, 2021 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Despite the best efforts of dissenters whose eyes were opened after public hearings, the final report of a commission studying Massachusetts’ mandatory child abuse reporting law still produced a report that encourages further increasing the reach of the state’s child welfare surveillance state, according to the National Coalition for Child Protection Reform. This approach would harm the children it is intended to help, leaving all Massachusetts children less safe.

NCCPR discusses its findings in an in-depth analysis released today, [Failing Job One](#). Though the analysis is specific to a Massachusetts commission, it is relevant nationwide since every state has similar laws, enacted as a result of similar misconceptions.

After public hearing witnesses blasted draft recommendations from the Massachusetts Mandated Reporter Commission to expand mandated reporting and documented how badly mandatory reporting backfires, a member of the Commission said she was “taken aback” by what she heard and finding out if the intense criticism from distinguished scholars, advocates, and families that had endured the Massachusetts child welfare system is correct “should be Job One.”

But the Commission wasn’t able to do Job One. That’s because the Chair of the Commission, Maria Mossaides, who also heads the state Office of Child Advocate (OCA), and her allies in the state Department of Children and Families (DCF) prevented it, just as they kept vital information away from Commission members for more than a year. OCA and DCF sincerely want to help children. But they cling to the discredited belief that expanding surveillance of families and removal of children to foster care makes children safer – even in a state like Massachusetts, which already tears apart families at a rate 60% above the national average when rates of child poverty are factored in.

Here’s some of what OCA and DCF didn’t want the full Commission to know:

□ “Mandatory Reporting” laws, which force vast numbers of people to report any suspicion of child abuse or neglect to family policing agencies (a more accurate term than “child welfare”

agencies) don't work. They drive families away from seeking help, for fear that they will be reported to an agency that can take away their children. And the huge number of false reports generated by mandatory reporting overloads agencies, making it harder to find the very few children in real danger. Mandatory reporting laws make all children less safe.

□ Scholars, including many original supporters of mandatory reporting, have expressed serious doubts about it, and [research on the failure of mandatory reporting](#) is clear. But because it has been an integral part of the system for decades, and because that system has been fueled by horror stories that are as rare as they are tragic, that skepticism has not been part of the discussion among the general public and lawmakers. It should be.

□ Mandatory reporting fails in large part because most cases are nothing like the horror stories. Far more common are cases in which [poverty is confused with "neglect."](#) That confusion, plus deeply embedded racial bias are the biggest problems in the system. Mandatory reporting compounds these problems.

□ OCA and DCF effectively kept the Commission in a bubble – stage-managing the process so the full Commission heard only what OCA and DCF wanted them to hear, and nothing about the scholarship showing mandatory reporting is a failure that makes children less safe and compounds racial and class bias. As a result, the Commission (really Mossaides and her staff at OCA) came up with a series of draft recommendations almost all of which were dreadful.

□ But between the start of the Commission's work and the issuance of its draft recommendations a year later, America changed. A racial justice reckoning that began with policing was beginning to spread to child welfare. As a result, the recommendations prompted furious opposition – so much that the Commission had to do what it should have done at the beginning, hold public hearings.

□ During four hours of virtual hearings, almost every speaker condemned the draft recommendations. It left several commission members, in their own words, "surprised" "shocked" and "taken aback." They were so upset that, in the end, the Commission took no votes and formally recommended nothing.

□ But that didn't stop OCA and DCF. The full Commission had little time to edit the final report. OCA and DCF were able to spin the document to support the recommendations to expand the child welfare surveillance state and oppose the very few recommendations that would have ever-so-slightly curbed it. She included misleading language and framing that had been specifically opposed by dissenting commissioners. In short, OCA and DCF were able to stop the Commission from doing Job One. So now it is up to the Massachusetts Legislature.

But most lawmakers now are where the Commission was when it began – barely aware that mandatory reporting is even controversial let alone harmful. That is why, in this report, NCCPR not only offers an overview of the failure of mandatory reporting and misconceptions about

family policing in general, we also go through the report page-by-page pointing out the false framing and other ways OCA and DCF are still trying to mislead us.

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