

## **Children's Justice Act Orientation**

Welcome to the Children's Justice Act State Task Force, the following information sheet provides an overview of the Children's Justice Act, the role of the State Task Force, and the current activities of the Alaska CJA State Task Force.

**Background Information:** Section 107(a) of Title I of the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) authorizes grants to States for the purpose of assisting States in developing, establishing, and operating programs designed to improve (1) the handling of child abuse and neglect cases, particularly cases of child sexual abuse and exploitation, in a manner which limits additional trauma to the child victim; (2) the handling of cases of suspected child abuse or neglect related fatalities; and (3) the investigation and prosecution of cases of child abuse and neglect, particularly child sexual abuse and exploitation.

Section 107(d) of CAPTA requires the State Task Force to undertake a comprehensive review and evaluation of law, policy and the investigative, administrative and judicial handling of cases of child abuse and neglect and to make training and policy recommendations in each of the three categories in Section 107(e)(1).

Section 107 (e) (1) (A), (B) and (C) encompass the **Children's Justice Act (CJA) State Task Force** responsibilities as follows:

- (A) investigative, administrative, and judicial handling of cases of child abuse and neglect, particularly child sexual abuse and exploitation, as well as cases involving suspected child maltreatment related fatalities and cases involving a potential combination of jurisdictions, such as interstate, Federal-State, and State-Tribal, in a manner which reduces the additional trauma to the child victim and the victim's family and which also ensures procedural fairness to the accused:
- (B) experimental, model, and demonstration programs for testing innovative approaches and techniques which may improve the prompt and successful resolution of civil and criminal court proceedings or enhance the effectiveness of judicial and administrative action in child abuse and neglect cases, particularly child sexual abuse and exploitation cases, including the enhancement of performance of court-appointed attorneys and guardians ad litem for children, and which also ensure procedural fairness to the accused; and
- (C) reform of State laws, ordinances, regulations, protocols and procedures to provide comprehensive protection for children from abuse, particularly sexual abuse and exploitation, while ensuring fairness to all affected persons.

CJA funds should be used for programs to reform State systems and improve the processes by which States respond to cases of child abuse and neglect, particularly child sexual abuse and exploitation and cases of suspected child abuse or neglect related fatalities. This will enable states to deal more effectively with both the child victim and the offender and to limit additional trauma to the child victim.

The ongoing activities of a State Task Force in monitoring implementation of its recommendations and continuing interagency collaboration in carrying out the intent of the Act may be supported with CJA grant funds. Supporting child abuse prevention programs or treatment services is not an appropriate use of CJA funds.

**CJA Task Force Membership must include representation from the following disciplines:**

- Law Enforcement Community
- Criminal Court Judge
- Civil Court Judge
- Prosecuting Attorney
- Public Defender
- Child Advocate (Attorney for Children)
- CASA Representative
- Health Professional
- Mental Health Professional
- Child Protective Service Agency
- Individual experienced in working with children with disabilities
- Parent Group Representative

**Alaska's State Task Force Membership list as of May, 2005:**

- Ben Summit, Public Defender
- Brita Bishop, Mental Health representative
- **Cathy Baldwin-Johnson**, Health Professional – **CJA Vice- Chair**
- Diane Payne, Children's Justice Specialist, Tribal Law and Policy Institute
- Dorothea S. Owens, CASA Representative
- Fred Van Wallinga, Individual experienced in working with children with disabilities
- John Bioff, Tribal Attorney
- Judge Charles Huguelet, Criminal and Civil Judge representative
- Linda West, Child Protective Service Agency
- Jan Rutherford, Assistant Attorney General
- Margaret Volz, Health Professional
- Pam Karalunas, Parent Group Representative
- Rob Wood, Juvenile Probation
- Rodney Dial, Alaska State Troopers
- Kevin Vandegriff, Anchorage Police Dept.
- **Susan Heuer**, Child Advocate- **CJA Chair**
- Susanne DiPietro, Alaska Court System
- Teresa Foster, Prosecuting Attorney

If a Task Force member changes employment then he/she must submit in writing notice of the change and any changes to the discipline he or she represents. The Task Force will consider the appropriateness of the person staying on the Task Force based on the information received.

**Alaska is the recipient of a Children's Justice Act Grant, which is awarded through the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families. This grant award is a population based formula, therefore the award for the state of Alaska is relatively small:**

1999 award \$67,540

2000 award \$67,238

2001 award \$92,116

2002 award \$89,520

2003 award \$89,520

2004 award \$89,502

These grant awards have historically funded three grant components:

1. Meetings of the State Task Force both telephonically and in person;
2. A half time Program Coordinator with the Office of Children's Services to manage the grant, coordinate meetings, and implement grant activities and projects;
3. Fund projects and activities identified by the State Task Force to address the mission of the Children's Justice Act.

**Projects funded by the Alaska State Task Force with CJA grant money in previous years have included:**

- The establishment of a Child Advocacy Center Network and Initial Capacity Building for the Network
- Forensic Interviewing Training for Child Protection Workers
- Increase the number of Multidisciplinary teams.
- Training for medical professionals on identifying child abuse and neglect.

**Fiscal Year 2004 activities of the CJA State Task Force:**

- Development of a strategic plan for the Task Force- facilitated strategic planning sessions were held on June 16, 2003 and September 23, 2003 to develop a plan for the fiscal year. The plan includes activities and projects to be funded using CJA grant funds.
- Three Strategic Initiatives were identified from the June 16, 2003 meeting:
  - Task Force Development: all federally required disciplines need to be represented on the Task Force, therefore membership recruitment was initiated. Members were also required to submit an outline of their roles and responsibilities as it pertains to the CJA Task Force.
  - Base Line Data: the Task Force wanted to identify what was happening from a systemic perspective to address child sexual abuse and maltreatment in terms of sharing of information and data.

- Surveys: The Task Force contracted with a professional survey agency to conduct phone based interviews with stakeholders and colleagues on the strengths and challenges in the current system in response to child sexual abuse in order to develop a basis for future recommendations.
- The final Strategic Plan on September 23, 2003 has five strategic initiatives including:
  - Task Force Development: continue to identify members as appropriate, and update orientation packet. Schedule three face to face Task Force meetings for the year- December 12, 2003, February 3, 2004, and April 20, 2004.
  - Data: The Task Force will begin to track data on child sexual abuse cases and will generate a report – the first report will be due in February.
  - Surveys: Dittman Research Corporation completed a survey for the Task Force, a summary of the report will be made available to the public by December 31, 2003.
  - Training: The Task Force is going to maintain a calendar of training events and a list of Alaska based trainers, and will co-sponsor trainings.
  - Policy Endorsement: It is part of the Task Force’s responsibility to recommend improvements to the system of addressing child sexual abuse and exploitation. Communication and commitment across agencies and disciplines is vital to be effective in this field, therefore the Task Force is reviewing the existing “Interagency Agreement” and asking for a renewed commitment from representatives to the agreement. Additionally, one area identified by the Task Force are more comprehensive criminal background checks, therefore, Task Force members are looking into allowing pertinent agencies access to the National Crime Information Center (NCIC) for nationwide criminal background checks.

The Program Coordinator for the CJA Task Force and grant is Bridget Crawford.  
All inquiries should be directed to the Program Coordinator.

Contact Information:

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