April 21, 2020

Dear Partners:

As our state grapples with the impact of the Covid-19 crisis on all of our child- and family-serving state and local systems, the Office of the Child Advocate (OCA) is seeking to collect timely, accurate and specific information about the gaps and barriers families are experiencing as they try to access services.

We know that state agencies are working very hard in response to the Covid-19 crisis, and that the challenges we are collectively experiencing are unprecedented. We also know that gaps exist and that there are opportunities for improvement.

The OCA is an independent state agency that serves children and families across the Commonwealth. Our goal is to ensure all children receive appropriate, timely and quality services. The OCA regularly collects and analyzes data and makes recommendations to legislators and professionals to improve these services. Learn more about the OCA here: www.mass.gov/childadvocate

To help us better monitor the situation on-the-ground and make well-informed recommendations, we are asking for you to share with us information on case-specific challenges you, your staff and/or your client families have been unable to resolve through the normal state agency administrative resolution channels, which will guide us in our work with our partners at state agencies to develop real-time solutions. Our goal is to translate the specific information we receive into verified trends and patterns that can be communicated by our office to state agencies so that these trends and patterns can be addressed. The more specific information we receive, the better job we can do advocating for systemic fixes.

We are gathering this information through our already-existing Complaint Line, which anyone with concerns about a child or youth who is receiving state services can contact. We are asking you to share the information about the Complaint Line with your front-line staff and families you work with (as appropriate) and ask them to report any concerns they have with the delivery of services. We will take any complaint, but are particularly interested in those that are related to the Covid-19 situation as we will be translating complaints related to Covid-19 into trend information for state agencies.
You can reach the OCA Complaint Line in the following ways:

- **Email**: childadvocate@mass.gov
  - Please use the subject line “Covid-19 Issue”
- **Phone**: 617-979-8360

Please provide the following information in your email or phone call:

- Incident Date (to extent possible)
- Where Incident Occurred (e.g. Town)
- Your Role (e.g. attorney, caseworker, foster parent)
- Description of Incident/Issue
- Description of Actions Taken to Resolve Through Agency Administrative Procedures
  - *(OCA staff can provide guidance on this if you/staff/client are unsure of the process)*
- Any Additional Helpful Context
- Consent to provide this detailed information to the state agency at issue if need-be 
  - (Y/N)

The OCA is not a direct-advocacy agency. Although Complaint Line staff will follow up with individual complaints, the OCA’s role is to advocate to state agencies for systematic changes. Here is what we do when someone contacts the Complaint Line:

1) OCA staff will read/listen to your concerns, and direct you to resources, information and other options to help you navigate complex service systems and address the problem.

2) Of particular importance in this crisis, **we will be tracking and analyzing the complaints we receive and looking for patterns**. We will compile this information on a regular basis and bring the overarching concerns and trends to the relevant state agencies.

For more information on the OCA Complaint line, including a more complete description of what we can and cannot do to help resolve complaints, see: [www.mass.gov/how-to/file-a-complaint-with-the-oca](http://www.mass.gov/how-to/file-a-complaint-with-the-oca)

Thank you for your help in this effort. If you have questions, please contact our Senior Director of Quality Assurance, Christine Palladino-Downs at Christine.Palladino-Downs@mass.gov.

Sincerely,

Maria Mossaides
Director, Office of the Child Advocate