

Summary of Conference Call

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement
Advisory Committee on Family Residential Centers
Subcommittee on Education
May 24, 2016

The U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Advisory Committee on Family Residential Centers (ACFRC), Subcommittee on Education convened for its weekly meeting on Tuesday, May 24, 2016, via teleconference from 12:00 P.M. to approximately 12:50 P.M. The purpose of the meeting was for subcommittee members to continue the discussion on recommendation topics.

Attendance:

Subcommittee Members Present for the Teleconference:

- BethAnn Berliner
- Anadora Moss
- Michelle Brané

Others Present:

- Liz Cedillo-Pereira, Senior Advisor, ICE; Alternate Designated Federal Officer (ADFO), ACFRC
- Andrea Washington, Special Assistant, ICE
- Maryam Ali, Special Assistant, ICE

Opening Remarks:

Chair BethAnn Berliner performed a short roll call, and she acknowledged the ICE staff on the call.

General Meeting:

Chair Berliner started with a readout of the subcommittee Chairs call. She informed members that a date for a summer meeting of the full Committee is forthcoming and that ICE is aiming to communicate with the subcommittees by the end of the week regarding a timeline for responding to their requests for additional information.

Remarking on the status of the three groups, Chair Berliner said all of the subcommittees continue to express struggles with the fact that they do not feel like they have strong enough baseline evidence to make well-informed and detailed recommendations that are aligned with data sources. The Chair noted that the approach the Subcommittee on Education has taken—moving forward with recommendations based on expertise and known best practices and reshaping later if more information is eventually provided—is a bit of a different tact from the rest of the groups. She said that she believes this approach has allowed the subcommittee to make some pretty good progress in building out a draft set of recommendations.

Chair Berliner added, however, that she thinks the current recommendations matrix does not reflect the detention management expertise possessed by Vice Chair Anadora Moss. She said it was crucial to add more on this issue and asked the Vice Chair if she would spend some time over the next week building out some of these recommendations. Vice Chair Moss said she looked forward to doing so, and Michelle Brané said she would be happy to assist.

The Vice Chair, referencing notes from the previous meeting, restated her interest in having the ICE sexual assault coordinator participate in a future subcommittee call to take specific questions about implementation of the Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA) at the family residential centers (FRCs). Special Assistant Andrea Washington said the ICE team would definitely look into getting the coordinator on the phone for an upcoming meeting. Vice Chair Moss added that she knows contracts with companies managing the FRCs should contain language that requires them to meet PREA obligations. She mentioned that she previously requested verification that those requirements were indeed in the contracts.

Chair Berliner then reminded the subcommittee that at least two members of the full Committee are intending to go on a tour of the Berks Family Residential Center (Berks), preferably when school is in session so they can provide the group with information about schooling at the facility.

The Chair moved the conversation back to the subcommittee's recommendations matrix, asking if members thought there were still missing issues and if they would be okay with her fine-tuning some of the text. Vice Chair Moss and Ms. Brané agreed that they did not see any holes in the matrix and that they were fine with text being tweaked.

Chair Berliner said she had started going through the document and adding comment boxes in places where she thought there needed to be more discussion. The Chair stated that she has not deleted anything because she believes the subcommittee is still in brainstorming mode for the next week or two, but she wants everyone to begin thinking about where they can tighten up the matrix.

Chair Berliner then pointed out that on the issue of teaching English language to mothers at the FRCs, the subcommittee had not done anything with it yet. She noted that there were potential opportunities to use some of the social and recreational groups the mothers participate in as vehicles for language practice, but said there is no evidence that these groups were being used in this manner.

Ms. Brané said that based on her experiences at the residential centers, she thought the recreational groups were likely just being used to pass the time at the facilities and were not being utilized for English language learning unless one of the mothers decided to push this on their own initiative. She continued that she would be willing to write something up about how social groups could be used to help in this area, but said it was worth getting confirmation from ICE on whether or not the recreational groups have an English language learning component to them before doing a deep dive.

Chair Berliner said this was an important element to explore because the mothers at the FRCs do not have time and are not inclined to sit in a classroom with an English as a Second Language teacher to learn basic grammar. However, she added, it would be very beneficial if mothers could leave the facilities with some basic vocabulary that helps them navigate their children's school and medical care. She said there might not be a need to go very deep with recommendations on the issue; one or two recommendations could be fine.

Transitioning the conversation to the topic of curriculum and instruction as they relate to special education, Chair Berliner said she interviewed a leader in her community who runs a very successful newcomers school and also has expertise in assessing new immigrants who have special education needs and no English language skills. She said she wanted to speak with this individual to ensure that the subcommittee's recommendations fell within an understanding of best practices by those who are specialists in the field. The Chair also spoke with one of her colleagues who is a specialist in teaching new immigrants and second language learners. Chair Berliner said she walked away from these conversations with a handful of really good recommendations about what the field considers to be best practices in math education, writing education, and reading. She stated that she knows in a short period of time, it might be hard for teachers at the residential centers to adopt an entirely new curriculum, so she made the recommendation that educators should build their curriculum around these best practices and embed them in their work. Vice Chair Moss and Ms. Brané said they thought that approach made sense. The Chair added that she did have some apprehension about partial implementation, but said her colleague felt that there is so much good structural support for special education teachers that even partial adoption of the best practices would be really helpful.

Ms. Brané, noting her concern about vendors and other professionals who receive contracts not having the expertise for the particular population at the FRCs, said she thinks it might be worth exploring how to incorporate the idea that these best practices need to be a large part of the criteria for vendor selection. She said family detention is an especially challenging issue, and most detention vendors are not used to dealing with all that it entails.

Vice Chair Moss stated that she agreed with Ms. Brané's comments, but said she did believe vendors are aware that they are in a different environment when it comes to family detention, and there have been efforts made to reach out to staff and educators that are a fit. She said she wanted to be sure that the subcommittee was not making assumptions about what is or is not in place until they received more information about it.

Ms. Brané said this goes into information the subcommittee needs from ICE and asked if this line of questioning was part of their document of additional requests. After some back and forth, the group decided that they had asked questions around issues of curriculum and contracts, but not the exact matters they were currently talking about. Chair Berliner said the subcommittee would likely come across other topics where they realize they have not asked a particular question, and members should be sure to get those questions to ICE staff as soon as possible, given that the larger request for additional information was already in the process of being reviewed.

The Chair continued that what she was picking up from the discussion is that there is concern about the criteria used for identifying and hiring vendors who provide educational services. Ms. Brané said knowing this piece of information would be helpful.

Chair Berliner then said that on curriculum and instruction, she went extremely granular in the details because she wants to ensure that practitioners in the field see respected, really solid practices rooted in the recommendations. Vice Chair Moss said she thought the level of granularity was good because it brings credibility to the recommendations not just for people outside of the residential centers, but also for the staff and educators on-site.

Ms. Brané mentioned that she was also planning to meet with experts in the areas of special education and grade placement to make sure the subcommittee's recommendations are on the right track. Chair Berliner said that she brought up the subject of grade placement during her interviews, and it seems like the residential centers are following what the newcomer schools are doing to help with assessing students. She said in her opinion where it gets complicated with grade placement is when children transition out of a residential center and into their new U.S. school. However, Chair Berliner added that short of sending children from the FRCs with documentation stating what grade level they were at while in a facility, there is not much that can be done to control how schools and school districts handle grade placement. Ms. Brané said she agreed with this assessment.

Chair Berliner reiterated her ongoing concern about the grade placement and transitioning of older, high school-aged students. She said young people aged 16 and 17 are not going to have enough time to accrue the credits required to graduate with a diploma from any high school or earn a GED unless they have the language skills. She continued that she was uncomfortable making a recommendation about an alternative track for these students.

Ms. Brané concurred, stating that it is a hard balance. She said she thinks the idea the subcommittee should continue to move forward with is ensuring that young people know their rights and have the information they need to make informed choices based on their individual preferences, abilities, and needs. Ms. Brané said these kids are not all the same, and the generally short length of stay at the residential centers is enough time to educate them about their options.

As the meeting neared its close, Chair Berliner said she would take the next few days to clean up the group's matrix, mostly shifting some items around, tweaking language, and adding more comments for discussion.

The Chair then asked subcommittee members if they had any further issues to cover, and Vice Chair Moss and Ms. Brané said they had no other items. With no additional issues to address, Chair Berliner adjourned the meeting.

Adjournment:

The subcommittee adjourned at approximately 12:50 P.M.