

# Guidelines Review and Oversight Committee (GROC)

## 2024 Jul 10, 10:00a–12:00n – Meeting Minutes

(Discussions are organized by topic, not necessarily by actual sequence.)

### I Opening business and participants list

At 10:00 a.m. Kim opened the Teams meeting. She said Jess, Colleen, and Patrick would not be able to attend today – though Patrick did join us later, at about 11:15 a.m.

Below is a list of all GROC participants (x = those present today):

	Community reps	Title, plus county(ies) covered	Location
--	Hoge, Jess	COC Petroleum	Winnett
x	Thiel, Cindy	Atty (ret.) Missoula	Missoula
--	Timmer, Colleen	Master Mineral, Missoula	Missoula
	State workers	Division & role and/or title	Location
x	Christensen, Kelsey	CSSD Investigator	Butte
x	Delaney, Barb	CSSD Bureau chief, SPOT	Helena
x	Ensey, Miranda	CSSD Investigator	Great Falls
x	Hochhalter, Priscilla	CSSD Recorder / Training specialist	Helena
x	Leach, Kial	CSSD Compliance manager	Helena
x	Martin, Chad	CSSD Investigator	Helena
x	Pappe, Kate	CSSD Investigator	Missoula
x	Quinn, Patrick	OLA Staff attorney	Missoula
x	Twardoski, Christie	CSSD Administrator	Helena
x	Watne, Kim	CSSD Chair / Guidelines project manager	Helena

### II Mission, purpose, requirements, process

This topic (not discussed today) is retained here to give background on GROC. GROC is an advisory body with expertise in MT child support guidelines (GLs); it is authorized to do research, develop recommendations, suggest proposed rule changes and, every four years, file a federally-required quadrennial review and report (QR) in the MT State Plan. Key points are recapped below.

Mission and purpose. From [45 CFR 302.56\(e\)](#) – GROC’s mission is: “The State must review, and revise, if appropriate, the child support guidelines...at least once every four years to ensure that their application results in the determination of appropriate child support order amounts.”

Requirements. From [45 CFR 302.56\(h\)\(1–3\)](#) – requirements include: considering economic data; analyzing case data; and allowing for meaningful public input (usually via community representatives on GROC) – especially concerning low-income families.

Process. From [MCA 40-5-209](#) – any proposed changes to GLs are submitted for consideration for administrative rule changes, or as proposed legislation to MT’s legislature.

### III 2024 Quadrennial Review / Report (QR)

#### A Economic, tax, and case data

The QR typically covers at least economic data, tax data, and case data (methodology, findings, variances, payment histories by case characteristics, and other analytics). General data from past GROC meetings – not discussed today but retained here for future use – includes:

- US Department of Agriculture (USDA) 2015 figures on cost of raising a child (<https://www.fns.usda.gov/cnpp/2015-expenditures-children-families>).
- MT Department of Labor & Industry (DLI) 2023 Labor Day report on MT’s economy (<https://lmi.mt.gov/docs/Publications/LMI-Pubs/Labor-Market-Publications/LDR20221.pdf>).

## B Testing

Since we last met, no additions or changes have been made in test-case data (previously shared with GROC) for the 2024 QR.

## IV Guidelines (GLs) – updated considerations

Kim and Kial have been working a long time toward key goals – especially the goal of making the GLs formula easier to use and to explain, without significantly changing the resulting obligation amounts. They are close to achieving this goal, but are at a point where they are really needing and requesting ‘fresh eyes’ and new input from GROC participants.

### A Excel calculator tool

Kim and Kial showed their new Excel tool for calculations, which accepts manually-entered data and applies the proposed new guidelines formula to yield a support obligation amount. They asked everyone to please test it out with varying values, and then give feedback.

### B Proposed updates

Kim and Kial presented these seven proposed updates to the guidelines:

1. Removing tax factors; doing so would eliminate the need to update or reprogram guidelines calculator software whenever tax laws change.
2. Updating PIG percentages for each parent’s personal allowance (self-support reserve).
3. Updating SOLA percentages.
4. Updating primary support allowance percentages for any subsequent child(ren) of the calculation.
5. Using brackets or ranges of days (instead of counting each individual day) for adjustments to parenting days.
6. Removing credit for either parent’s other child(ren) not of the calculation.
7. Simplifying, and making more transparent, the method of calculating a minimum support obligation.

The goal is to achieve, with the proposed updates, obligation amounts that are similar to those achieved currently but with a simpler calculation, and to improve understanding of how those amounts are determined. The current guidelines are very complex.

## V General questions and discussions

Kim and Kial highly encouraged and appreciated all the great questions and discussions today.

- Kate said she has seen overly-complex formulas that got ‘fixed’ by eliminating too many details that still should be considered. Kim acknowledged that oversimplification can be a pitfall, and that she and Kial are working hard to avoid that error.
- Kelsey asked about health insurance being separated by medical, dental, etc. – in a calculation, isn’t it all just one combined amount? Kim said yes, it is; those divisions are there just to help users understand and complete the field(s),
- Cindy asked, are we giving double credit for health insurance for the child? It matters whether or not there’s a court order. Kim and Kial promised to dig into this further.
- On the new Excel calculator tool, it was suggested that all the income payment schedules (weekly, biweekly, monthly, etc.) could be replaced by just one cell for annual income.

Various other questions and comments were raised. Kim said, please keep it up!

## VII Closing business / adjournment

Kim and Kial continue to stress the need for, and to express appreciation for, GROC testing – especially with their new Excel calculator tool.

We adjourned at 12:05. Kim hopes to reconvene next month (date and time to be determined).