Guidelines Review and Oversight Committee (GROC)
2024 Nov 20, 1:30p–2:30p – Meeting Minutes
(Discussions are organized by topic, not necessarily by actual sequence.)

*   I   Opening business and participants list

At about 1:36 p.m., the Teams meeting officially began. Below, x = those present today:

	Community reps	Title, plus county(ies) covered		Location
x	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 Supervisor	Missoula
x	Quinn, Patrick	OLA	Staff attorney	Missoula
--	Twardoski, Christie	CSSD	Administrator	Helena
x	Watne, Kim	CSSD	Chair / Guidelines project manager	Helena

II   Mission; purpose; requirements; process; Quadrennial Report (QR)

[Today the census data resource was added at the end of this section; nothing else changed.]

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, prepare a federally-required quadrennial review and report (QR) on its work. This report is submitted to DPHHS and cited in MT's State Plan.

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) – It is required to: consider economic data; analyze case data; and allow for meaningful public input, especially regarding low-income families. ('Public input' often comes from GROC's community representatives and their case experiences.)

Process. From MCA 40-5-209 – any proposed GLs changes are submitted for consideration for administrative rule changes, or as proposed legislation to MT's legislature.

Quadrennial Review / Report (QR). To fulfill the above, typically the QR covers at least tax data, economic data, and case data (methodology, findings, variances, payment histories by case traits, etc.). For the 2024 QR, key resources – retained here for reference – include…

- 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).
- US Department of Agriculture (USDA) 2015 figures on cost of raising a child (https://www.fns.usda.gov/cnpp/2015-expenditures-children-families).
- US Census Bureau data (https://data.census.gov/profile/Montana).

*   III   2024 QR (due Dec. 31): Review of current draft

[Note: Virtually all of today's discussion content is embodied under this main heading.]

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* Today, asterisk-marked sections were discussed / updated; other (non-marked) sections – often retained for reference only – were not.

Today we continued reviewing the QR draft. Below, only section 'B' is new ('A' and 'C' are not).

A   Proposed changes (recap)

To recap, the QR structure includes…
- Background of GLs / GROC; recommendations (summarized); analysis of CSSD case data; analysis of MT economic data; recommendations (in detail); and conclusion.
- Numerous charts and graphs - especially in both data analysis sections (certain data analysis is federally required; other data analysis is not required but is of interest).

Below is a summary of the proposed changes to GLs.

The section on recommendations (in detail) proposes updates in these areas:
1. Use gross (not net) income as a basis for support calculations.
2. Update PIG percentages for each parent's personal allowance.
3. Update SOLA percentages.
4. Update child's primary support allowance.
5. Adjust parenting days.
6. Remove credit for other child(ren), not of the calculation, in parents' homes.
7. Update minimum support obligation.
8. Update credit for retirement contributions.
9. Implement self-support protection.

In the above list:
- Items 1-7 have been referenced in minutes from several past meetings.
- Item 8 has been added since, and partly as a result of, our most recent meeting(s).
- Item 9 was added, in response to federal guidance [45 CFR § 302.56(c)(1)(ii)] to pay special attention to obligated parents with income less than two times the poverty guidelines.

The ongoing goal is for MT GLs to be transparent, standardized, equitable, and user-friendly.

B   Input and finalization

Today, for this 2024 QR, GROC members gave input on, and agreed upon, how to discuss…
- Parenting days. It was decided to propose general 'brackets' in the QR, with exact number of days in each bracket specified later in the decision brief. Patrick noted the common 110-255 split hails from the ~1990s when NCPs often had the kids for, say, summers and every-other-year holidays; in ~2010, a proposed change to 0-365 was rejected by MT attorneys - but this proposed use of brackets is different and, GROC members agree, worth pursuing.
- Non-mandatory contributions to retirement accounts (IRA, 401k, etc.).
- Error corrections.
- Various other small suggestions.

More thorough reviews are being done by Cindy and Patrick; others may do so as well. Please submit all resulting input via email, so we all can see it and avoid repeating each other too much.

C   Next steps (recap)

Based on all of the above, Kim and Kial will prepare (to submit to CSSD Administrator Christie Twardoski, who will submit to DPHHS) proposed GLs changes in two documents, as follows:
1. In QR (due Dec. 31): General proposed changes will be submitted.
2. In decision brief (likely sometime next year): Specific details will be submitted.

If decision brief is approved, we'll proceed with proposed changes.

* IV   Closing business / adjournment

Please submit final input by, say, month's-end – to allow time to finalize and implement it.
This brief meeting adjourned at about 2:18p. We'll reconvene in December only if necessary.

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