



House Children & Seniors Committee

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Foster Care Reviews and Reforms

Presented by:

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Testimony of:

Deneen Dryden, Director of Prevention and Protection Services
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Testimony on:

Foster Care System Reviews and Reforms

Chairman Alford, Vice Chair Gallagher, Ranking Member Ousley and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide information on recent reviews and reforms of the Kansas foster care system.

The child welfare system in Kansas provides a safety net for vulnerable children and their families. Kansas child welfare is a many-layered system that is as broad in scope as it is deep in complexity. The continuum of the child welfare system begins with the first report of abuse and/or neglect called into the Kansas Protection Report Center or law enforcement if children are taken into police protective custody due to safety concerns. The matter next proceeds to involvement of the courts. The services provided to children and families involved with the Kansas Department for Children and Families (DCF) are heavily influenced by federal legislation and intertwined with the courts, other State agencies, private agencies, local community services and DCF's contractors. The various entities that work to improve child welfare in Kansas know that many factors drive the number of children who are placed into State custody. In FY 2016, for example, 31 percent of children removed and placed in foster care were in care due to primary reason of physical neglect or abuse. Moreover, 41 percent of these removals had a contributing factor of parental substance abuse. It is important to understand the context and complexity of the children, youth and families we serve.

In addition to the oversight provided by this committee and other committees within the Kansas Legislature, DCF also works with a number of other child welfare-related work groups, including the following:

- Supreme Court Task Force on Permanency Planning (SCTFPP)
- Judicial Council Juvenile Offender/Child in Need of Care Subcommittee
- Permanency Advisory Committee
- Citizen Review Panels
- Juvenile Justice Oversight Committee
- Kansas Adoptive and Foster Parent Association (approx. 2,000 members), official affiliate of the National Adoptive and Foster Parent Association
- Kansas Family Advisory Network, Inc.

Child and Family Services Review

DCF is also subject to stringent review from the federal government. All state child welfare programs participate in a Child and Family Services Review (CFSR), conducted by the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Administration for Children and Families (ACF) every several years. There have been two completed rounds of such review, and Kansas began the third review in 2015. Kansas was approved to utilize its

case review process already in place and used on an ongoing basis by the DCF Prevention and Protection Services (PPS) Data Unit. As a result of the CFSR, the State is provided feedback regarding numerous outcomes related to safety, permanency and well-being, and the State is then required to develop a Program Improvement Plan (PIP), which must be approved by the federal partners. Kansas has submitted its proposed PIP and is awaiting approval. All states have PIPs as a result of the CFSR process, as there is always room for improvement in the child welfare systems. Keeping children safe is of the utmost importance, and we are pleased that Kansas ranks highly among the states for safety of children in care. Please see the attached overview of the CFSR process for more information.

Legislative Post Audit

Moreover, DCF is currently undergoing an audit of its child welfare system by the Kansas Legislative Division of Post Audit (LPA). DCF, in response to audit concerns, established plans to strengthen monitoring of child welfare contractors and DCF staff. The State reviews and monitors accountability of the contractor's child welfare programs through direct oversight, case read processes and administrative site visits. If a problem is identified, the contractor is to develop a Corrective Action Plan (CAP) approved by DCF.

As mentioned previously, the child welfare system is expansive and complex, and DCF is only one of many entities involved in ensuring that children remain safe and families achieve stability. We are happy that the audit findings have allowed us to make substantial improvements in multiple program areas which will further the best interests of Kansas children.

Keeping children safe is of utmost importance, and we are pleased that Kansas ranks highly among the states for safety of children in care, as measured by the CFSR. In an ongoing effort to build upon that federally-recognized success, DCF developed an implementation plan to address the LPA recommendations. Please see the attached document entitled "Kansas Child Welfare, Enhancements and Improvements Progress Report" for a summary of this implementation plan.

As a result of the LPA finding on monthly in-person visits, DCF reviewed and revised policies that went into effect on Jan. 2, 2017. DCF also mandated a comprehensive online training on documentation that all DCF, contractor and CPA staff is to complete this month, January 2017. DCF also completes fingerprinting and background checks on all members living in a foster home who are ages 10 years and older. DCF will now receive real-time notification if there are any subsequent arrests or convictions.

Casey Family Programs Recommendations

DCF has also continued implementation of recommendations made by Casey Family Programs, including the use of a Practice Model. The Practice Model is a one-page document that has been approved by the Executive Team at DCF and is being released this month, with a strategic rollout plan for stakeholders around the state. Please see the attachment entitled "Kansas Department for Children and Families, Child Welfare Practice Model" to review this document. DCF has made numerous new changes to the

Kansas Protection Report Center, including a policy change to require a four-year degree in the human services area for new hires. DCF is aggressively pursuing applicants to fill openings for this new Intake Protection Specialist position.

DCF is aware of recommendations from our federal partners, as well as Casey Family Programs, to redefine abuse/neglect categories. DCF has identified those categories that will be moved from non-abuse and neglect to the abuse and neglect assignment-type. Making these changes includes IT system changes, which will require some time. However, changes have been made to policy in regards to in-person contact with the identified child and completion of a safety assessment.

DCF is also currently identifying the best safety/risk assessment for the State of Kansas. Casey Family Programs continues to assist with this, and the plans are to have this tool identified by July 2017. DCF staff has traveled to several states to observe and review specific assessment tools. Once Kansas identifies the best safety/risk assessment tool, this will help remove some of the potential subjectivity from findings.

Agency Policy Updates

DCF has been substantially updating and revising agency policies as well. In January 2017, there will be more than 120 new and/or revised policies in PPS, Policy and Procedures Manual (PPM) that incorporate best practices for intake, investigation/assessment, family services, family preservation, foster care, reintegration and adoption.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this overview. I will be glad to stand for any questions.