



House Children and Seniors Committee

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Overview on Kansas Department for Children and Families

Presented by:

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Testimony of:

Gina Meier Hummel, Acting Secretary
Kansas Department for Children and Families

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Overview on Department for Children and Families

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

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak to you today. I am grateful and humbled by the opportunity to serve as the Secretary. It is a great challenge, for me and the agency, as we seek to make the department the very best it can be.

I am a lifelong Kansan and have spent my career dedicated to the betterment of children and families of this great state. I have more than twenty-five years of experience in child welfare and human services administration. I started my career conducting child protective service investigations in Topeka. I have worked in licensing and supported foster care homes, relative placements and in different levels of residential care. I have spent years supervising and managing foster care and adoption programs. In addition to working in social services, I have managed large federal grants, large state programs and managed human service programs in the private sector. As some of you know, for the past seven months, I have been an active member of the Child Welfare System Taskforce. In sum, I am passionate about caring for the most vulnerable Kansans.

As we know, the agency has faced much scrutiny in the past couple of years. Be assured, we will rise to meet the challenges and we are working to address these criticisms and concerns. We absolutely want to provide the best services possible to all we have the opportunity to serve.

We have a renewed focus on the mission of the agency: *“To protect children, promote, healthy families and encourage personal responsibility.”* As you must have heard, the Governor and Lieutenant Governor have already made budget enhancements to aide in our efforts:

- Funding for outside vendor through RFP to conduct DCF top-to-bottom review (Total \$1.4 million)
- Funding for 20 additional child welfare staff and additional salary dollars to fill positions faster (Total \$1.5 million)
- Funding for foster care emergency placement so there are no children sleeping in offices (Total \$750K)
- Funding for additional investigative staff to track down missing foster care children (Total \$225K)

- \$500k for fingerprinting/background checks of foster care system
- Funding for new Kansas Protection Reporting Center assessment tool for better analytics and predictive modeling (Total \$1 million)
- Additional funding for community-based family preservation and family strengthening programs (Total \$6.55 million)

On day one, I implemented the DCF Action Plan. This includes a top-to-bottom review, staffing changes and contract accountability. As I lead DCF, you will see several changes take place immediately, in particular to child welfare:

- I have authorized a thorough review of how the agency engages our contractors, and we are closely monitoring their performance. As you know, in 1998, Kansas moved to a privatized system for foster care. In order for privatization to succeed, contract accountability is paramount.
- The agency will address the past issues of youth who have run from or left their placement. I now receive a daily report updating me about youth who are away from placement. I have also put together a team to actively look for the youth who have run from placement. This team has more than thirty years of investigation experience—including military and law enforcement. We understand these youths have critical needs that need to be addressed and thus, we are working hand-in-hand with our contractors and law enforcement to best serve those youth and children.
- Youth sleeping in contractor offices is unacceptable. In my first two weeks at DCF, I met with both Saint Francis Community Services (SFCS) and KVC Kansas and told them this practice must end. Children entrusted to my care should have a warm, safe place to sleep at night.
- We are working in conjunction with our child welfare contractors and the courts to facilitate timely reintegration and permanency for children. This means increasing prevention efforts and family strengthening programs so that more children can remain safely with their families. We are increasing our efforts to get youth who are ready for adoption, adopted. Additionally, we will be doing all we can to strengthen prevention programs, keeping children with their families when safe to do so.
- One of our agencies highest priorities is taking reports through our call center regarding children who may be in an abusive or neglectful environment. We know we have significant challenges with our report center. Fine tuning our response efforts is a focus of our attention, ensuring our assessment tools are up-to-date. It is vital that calls are handled efficiently and effectively, so that we can get out and help children that need us.

- We have started reviewing recent deaths of children who were in our custody, or those whom we were involved with. In order to see what we can change and learn as much as possible as a result of these tragedies. We will be as transparent about our findings as much we are able. This also means reviewing the agency policies with our attorneys, including a policy review on document retention and open records requests. If policies have not been followed, I will ensure that we take corrective action immediately. Additionally, I have instructed our legal team to review all aspects of the Child In Need of Care statutes, including, how and when we are able to produce a release of records for child death and near death cases. We will be proposing changes to CINC statutes this legislative session, allowing us to be more forthright in sharing records with the public when a child dies, or nearly dies as the result of abuse or neglect. While we are still reviewing, this is a step in the right direction for increasing transparency and we hope to introduce these changes as soon as possible. Transparency will be a key focus here at DCF.

Equally important to child protection are other programs, such as Economic and Employment Services (EES) and Child Support Services (CSS). Work is a gift that provides the opportunity to affirm our dignity as individuals. Our data, along with national data, shows that the Hope Act is working and is making a meaningful difference in the lives of individuals and families that we serve. We are a national model for welfare reform. Our policies serve as a springboard into a brighter, more hopeful future for Kansas families.

We will continue to concentrate on child support. Last Federal Fiscal Year (FFY), CSS collected more than \$204 million for Kansas families, and is on target to collect more than \$205 million this year. We will continue to work towards parental engagement and crafting policy that helps increase child support collections, bringing more money to Kansas families.

Rehabilitation Services (RS) and Vocational Rehabilitation will continue to be a focus. In the last 10 years, DCF has assisted more than 14,500 Kansans with disabilities gain successful employment. We will continue to support and empower Kansans with disabilities to realize their full potential.

We plan to work collaboratively with lawmakers, families, our partners and stakeholders to improve the systems we are charged with administering. Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to introduce myself. I'm happy to answer any questions you may have.