



Special Committee on Foster Care Adequacy

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State Foster Care System

Presented by:

Kathy Armstrong
Assistant Director for Legal Services
Kansas Department for Children and Families

Andrew Wiens, Director of Policy and Legislative Affairs
DCF Administration Building, 6th Floor
(785) 291-3629 www.dcf.ks.gov

Testimony of:

Kathy Armstrong, Assistant Director for Legal Services
Kansas Department for Children and Families
Topeka, Kansas

Testimony on:

Foster Care Perspective

Chairman Knox, Vice Chair O'Brien, and Members of the Committee:

I am Kathy Armstrong, Assistant Director for Legal Services, Prevention and Protection Services, Kansas Department for Children and Families (DCF). Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony regarding the child welfare foster care system in Kansas.

The Kansas Protection Report Center (KPRC) operates 24 hours/7 days per week to receive reports of alleged abuse/neglect of children and adults. In fiscal year 2014, KPRC received a total of 65,152 child reports. This testimony will focus on the description of the foster care process for children who come into out-of-home placements. Foster care services are provided for children and families in cases when a court determines a child to be in need of care and the parents are not able to meet the safety needs of their child. Most children who require foster care have been abused or neglected, and they have major developmental, physical and/or emotional needs that require a variety of services. Some children who have not been abused or neglected may be placed in foster care for reasons such as out-of-control behavior, overwhelmed parents, failure to attend school or running away from home. Children in foster care are most frequently placed with relatives or in licensed family foster homes. Some children may need more structured settings, such as a group home or residential center. DCF contracts with private agencies to provide foster care and reintegration services including case planning, placement, life skills and foster parent recruitment and training.

DCF posted a Request for Proposal (RFP) for our reintegration/foster care/adoption and family preservation contracts in 2012. Proposals were submitted, and DCF reviewed the proposals. The new contracts commenced July 1, 2013. Contract regions align with the four DCF regions. The two current contractors with DCF are Saint Francis Community Services (SFCS) and KVC. DCF is responsible to monitor the safety and well-being of children who are in foster homes and the progress the children are making toward returning to their family home or another permanent home. When it isn't feasible for a child to return home, the child may then become available for adoption due to termination of parental rights or voluntary relinquishment of the parents. Relatives are given first consideration as a placement option for the child pursuant to state and

federal law and best practices. Maintaining a child's connection to his/her relatives and culture and community is essential whenever possible. Some children are placed in other homes when a relative is unavailable or unable to provide care.

There are six protective factors woven into all aspects of the child welfare system, and DCF expects them to be a part of all contracts: Nurturing and Attachment, Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development, Parental Resilience, Social Connections, Concrete Support for Parents and Social and Emotional Competence of Children. When these are present, the well-being and health of children and families are improved. The contractors are required to integrate and implement these factors in their services. Input was received from the courts, partners, stakeholders, and region staff in developing the RFP. The changes reflected DCF's intention to continue close monitoring of the children in the Secretary's custody.

Children thrive when they are placed with families in safe environments. Relative placement does not require licensure (although they may choose to become licensed), but relatives need support to care for the children. Ensuring DCF's commitment that families receive the support they need to assist in improving the well-being of children in the Secretary's custody, providers determine the relative reimbursement rate and support. Providers also will set the proposed foster parent reimbursement, payment structure and support. Placements provide safety and stability for the children in the Secretary's care. Contractors are required to exhibit clear communication and relationships with relative providers, foster families, other child placing agencies and DCF. In an effort to maintain direct local input, providers are required to establish local advisory boards.

With the new contracts, DCF enhanced its role in monitoring children placed in the Secretary's custody. Placements, case plans and case plan goals are subject to DCF approval. Contractors are to notify DCF in advance of placement changes, unless an emergency exists. Important considerations for placements include grandparents, other relatives (including siblings), ability for the child to remain in the same school and same community and potential for permanency.

Health assessments were expanded to include Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders and the contractors monitor the use of psychotropic medications.

DCF expanded services to families following permanency in order to maintain safety and stability. Following permanency through reintegration, the contractors provide aftercare to work with the family, make attempts to have monthly in-person visits with the child and submit progress reports to DCF. If a child reaches permanency through

adoption, the contractors continue to serve the child and adoptive family for the life of the contract.

Youth deserve experience a childhood as they would within a stable family. Contractors must support children in the custody of the Secretary to participate in normalizing activities, such as extra-curricular activities. Further, contractors develop a transition plan with youth beginning at age 16 in order to teach them skills that reinforce personal accountability. Contractors assist youth in developing/maintaining permanent connections and mentors who will continue to serve as resources. A revised Transition Plan went into effect in July 2015 that provides a detailed plan to review and complete with youth in the Secretary's care.

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. With respect to Child Specific contract outcomes, some new Success Indicators were added in 2013, and again in 2015, to comply with new federal outcomes.

In order to remain responsive to families we serve, contractors are to maintain a complaint response model and collaborate with DCF in complaint responses. DCF maintains an Office of Customer Services and a Foster Parent and Youth Ombudsman to ensure responsiveness to concerns.

Specific to our Family Preservation contracts, the contractors are to utilize Family-centered practice values and components.

The family preservation contracts added emphasis on child rearing and behavior management coaching for parents and on the direct service provision for individual, couple and family therapy. There is also included an expectation for trauma-informed treatment.

The contractors must employ an in-home family preservation model and maintain fidelity to the model. The model is to implement safety and risk assessments. Staff training is to be provided. DCF assesses its model through outcomes, case reads and site visits.

There is a requirement to contact the family within 24 hours of a referral for family preservation services and to make the first in-person contact within two business days. DCF may require an earlier in-person contact if deemed appropriate.

The contractors are required to incorporate Family Group Decision Making Principles in their practice models. Family Preservation contractors provide documentation to DCF of

their intent to decrease intensity and/or frequency with families.

DCF remains mindful of the utilization and accountability for public funds. DCF will continue to operate the contracts as managed care contracts. Flexibility, cost controls, creativity and innovations are vital to success. The initial term of the contract was four years; however, DCF did renegotiate costs of the contract in 2015, as the same is allowed every two years. All funds paid to the contractors must be used only for services provided under the contract.

DCF believes the current contracts are consistent with the agency's mission and serve to strengthen some of Kansas's most vulnerable families.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this information today. I am happy to take your questions.