

OSAGE CITY POLICE

POLICE DEPARTMENT
911 Laing, PO Box 250
Tel: (785) 528-3131
Fax: (785) 528-4887



Fred Nech, Chief
Osage City, KS 66523
www.osagecity.com
chief@osagecity.com

To The Special Committee on Foster Care Adequacy Regarding Foster Care and Law Enforcement Interactions

November 17, 2015

Chairman Senator Knox and Committee Members,

The Osage City Police Department provides twenty-four hour per day coverage with only six sworn officers, usually resulting in only one officer available per shift serving a community of three thousand with limited resources.

From my perspective of a twenty-three year law enforcement career, the Foster Care Industry is overloaded; thus placing children in homes where they cannot naturally function; and enticing foster homes with more money for placing "troubled" children, causing numerous problems in the foster home, community, and law enforcement.

I would like to share three of several stories to highlight the issues law enforcement and the community faces dealing with foster care facilities in our community.

Beginning in the year 2000, there was a foster home in our town who yearly reported all their foster children were "*out of control*" and now the foster parents were "*afraid*" of being harmed by the foster children and needed officers to remove the children from the home. Oddly enough, this occurred just before the foster parents were to take their yearly summer vacation and upon returning home, the same foster children were placed back in the home.

Each "*out of control*" and "*afraid*" incident required nearly the entire police department to respond to processing four foster children at one time. In this particular case, there was approximately 30 hours of work force split among four officers, who were called away from spending time with their families, to process and transport these children to other foster care facilities in the state. Even just one event is a major issue for requirements on

work force, overtime, fuel, and leaving the community without adequate law enforcement protection during processing and transporting the foster children.

The next illustration occurred February of 2014, as officers placed four-year-old and ten-month-old siblings into protective custody, removing them from their natural home due to child abuse. Officers processed the children for placement with juvenile intake. The nearest “TFI” foster home for children of that age was nearly 100 miles away with nighttime blizzard conditions for driving. Transporting children in a blizzard is reckless endangerment.

Rather than risk the life of the children, the duty officer and the chief of police had the children placed temporarily in a local “TFI” licensed home. The next day a “TFI” representative refused to make transportation arrangements, demanding that our agency transport the children 100 miles even though road conditions were still treacherous. Again, this placed a huge hardship on the police department and left the community unprotected a number of hours.

The last account was in the evening in March of 2015, when a foster child was out of control at the home. The duty officer arrived and spoke with the placement agency and caseworker from St. Francis Hospital. Because the foster mother did not want the foster child in her home, the caseworker asked the duty officer to summon an ambulance to transport the child to St Francis Hospital for a mental evaluation. The officer was told he needed to ride in the ambulance because of the child’s age and the foster mother’s refusal to assist. The officer was told that at the hospital someone would be there to take over the responsibility of the child.

However, upon arrival, there was nobody there to take responsibility of the child. The hospital refused to allow the foster child admittance without a guardian, therefore the duty officer had to stay with the foster child until someone from the foster care placement could arrive and take responsibility of the child. After nearly three hours, St. Francis Hospital was finally able to persuade the foster mother to come to the hospital to take over guardianship responsibility. This resulted in overtime and again our community was unnecessarily left unprotected, due to poor and irresponsible management by the foster care system. In fact, while the officer was unnecessarily tied-up with the foster care system, a person in town attempted suicide while there was no officer on duty to respond to the call.

There are hundreds of other accounts of foster children causing higher than normal responses for law enforcement such as fights, curfew, truancy, thefts, school weapons violations and alcohol/tobacco violations.

Recommendations:

1. More suitable placement of foster children into communities that match the community they are accustomed to.
2. Placement agencies need to take more responsibility to transport foster children, and when they are obviously using law enforcement as a free taxi service, that agency should be able to recover the cost of such service on behalf of the community they serve.
3. Quicker response to move children causing problems within the community.

I thank the Special Committee on Foster Care Adequacy for the opportunity to present these issues facing small-town police departments. Please know I am available for any questions from the Special Committee.

Fred Nech
Chief of Police

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