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House of Representatives
State of Idaho

MINORITY LEADER

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To: Joint Legislative Oversight Committee
From: Representative Christy Perry, Representative Mike Moyle, Representative John Rusche
Subject: Child Protection Services

Previously, the Idaho Office of Performance Evaluations completed a study of the process of committing juveniles to the Idaho Juvenile Corrections Department. The study found some interesting and alarming trends especially as they relate to child protection services. The study noted that "most frequently, juveniles committed to state custody from January to May 2012 showed up in Health and Welfare's child protection and children's mental health systems."

Currently, in 2016 these trends and others were brought to light when the germane committees held a joint hearing. It was at this hearing that numerous people came to testify regarding their dissatisfaction with the current state of Idaho's foster care system. The complaints allege punitive foster child movement, being "blacklisted" by the department, the development of behavioral and attachment issues of the children due to multiple moves, and pleas to improve the system.

Although legislation has been proposed this session to address some of the above issues, it is believed to be only a starting point. After committee testimony on the foster care bill presented this year, there appear to be numerous systemic issues within the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare, which need to be investigated.

This proposal requests the Office of Performance Evaluations to conduct a performance evaluation of our current foster care program, which would involve reviewing at least the following components:

1) Workload management
2) Caseload management (including interactions with parents and foster parents, and case files)
3) Data management
4) Hearing processes

The report, "Confinement of Juvenile Offenders" by the Idaho Office of Performance Evaluations has noted that "national literature clearly supports prevention and early intervention for at-risk children and their families" (p. 53). This proposal seeks to expound on those ideas and determine what efforts may successfully be enacted here in Idaho. The evaluation should identify areas which could be improved to

better promote the safety, permanency, and well- being of children in foster care or in State custody. Some specific areas the evaluation should look into are:

1) Early intervention strategies to prevent the escalation of family problems which in turn, create the need for foster care services.
2) Placement criteria for children in foster care. Specifically, the reasons a child should be moved from foster home to foster home. Are there best practices in other states to learn from?
3) How long is a child in the foster care system before a permanent placement is made? And what are the reasons permanent placement may be prolonged.
4) What are sufficient reasons for moving children from long term placements?
5) Are there better processes to coordinate the care of children in child protection services or fostercare across key stakeholders, including but not limited to, the department of health and welfare, families, health care providers, schools, and law enforcement. (Texas had a great online system to track services and documents through the maze)
6) Quality control measures to ensure family plans are being completed in a timely manner, contain accurate information, and follow federal guidelines.
7) Help determine reasonable options for placement of resources with an emphasis on maintaining the family unit and minimizing trauma to children.
8) Discuss policy options for early intervention and move Idaho away from operating in "crisis mode" in regards to child protection services.

The Idaho Department of Health and Welfare has committed to working with the legislature, utilizing the information the Office of Performance Evaluations can provide to help craft policies which will better serve our young children and minimize the devastating effects on their lives, which remain long after they are removed from foster care.

The ultimate goal is to develop policies which will minimize trauma to children, support the family unit, and lower the societal cost of placing children in child protection services and the juvenile correction system, all of which have long lasting detrimental effects.

Thank you for your consideration,

Representative John Rusche

Representative Christy Perry

Representative Mike Moyle