# Child Protection and Foster Care System

July 2016

## Background

During the 2016 legislative session, the Joint Legislative Oversight Committee received a request for the Office of Performance Evaluations to conduct an evaluation of the state's child protection and foster care system.

The Idaho Department of Health and Welfare's Child and Family Services Program is the primary agent responsible for child protection and foster care. In fiscal year 2015, Child and Family Services responded to approximately 8,600 child protection referrals and provided case management services for approximately 2,500 children and youth.

The study request came in response to legislators hearing dissatisfaction with the current state of Idaho's child welfare and foster care system expressed in testimonies given in multiple legislative committee meetings. After hearing testimony given in response to legislation presented during the 2016 legislative session, some legislators expressed concern about what seemed to be systemic issues within Idaho's Child and Family Services Program.

The request asked that the evaluation address potential systemic issues and identify areas which could be improved to better promote the safety, permanency, and well-being of children and youth in foster care or in state custody.

## Scope

The child welfare system is complex and involves many agencies and individuals. Its core function is to promote the safety, permanency, and well-being of children and youth by ensuring they are placed in appropriate homes, whether temporary or permanent, within appropriate timeframes. For our evaluation to produce complete, reliable, and useful information, we must consider the system as a whole. We have developed five questions that will function as the foundation of our evaluation approach.

1. In what ways is the system designed to place children and youth in appropriate homes in a timely manner?

2. How does the system determine its success at placing children and youth in appropriate homes in a timely manner?

3. How does the system promote stakeholder confidence in its decisions about appropriate homes for children and youth?

4. How well is the system succeeding at placing children and youth in appropriate homes in a timely manner?

5. How do any gaps or weaknesses in policy or practice affect the functionality of the system?

**Projected completion date: December 2016**