

MINUTES  
**HOUSE HEALTH & WELFARE COMMITTEE**

**DATE:** Thursday, January 26, 2017

**TIME:** 9:00 A.M.

**PLACE:** Room EW20

**MEMBERS:** Chairman Wood, Vice Chairman Packer, Representatives Hixon, Perry, Vander Woude, Redman, Gibbs, Blanksma, Hanks, Kingsley, Zollinger, Chew, Rubel

**ABSENT/  
EXCUSED:** None

**GUESTS:** Miren Unsworth and Michelle Weir, IDHW/FACS; Greg Casey, Veritas Advisors; Russ Barron, Stephanie Miller, Misty Wyatt, Sabrina Brown, and Gary Moore, DHW; Roger Sherman, Idaho Children's Trust Fund

**Chairman Wood** called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m.

**MOTION:** **Rep. Redman** made a motion to approve the minutes of the January 17, 2017, meeting. **Motion carried by voice vote.**

**Chairman Wood** welcomed **Rep. Green**, who is substituting for **Rep. Rubel**.

**Miren Unsworth**, Deputy Administrator, Division of Family and Community Services (FACS), presented the first annual Foster Care report. The Child and Family Services (CFS) program's primary commitment and responsibility is the safety, well being, and permanency of children who are victims of child abuse, neglect, or abandonment. FACS believes the best approach to support and protect children is to strengthen families to safely parent and meet their child's permanency and well being needs.

CFS program responsibilities fall into four broad areas: receiving abuse and neglect reports, assessing abuse and neglect allegations, providing ongoing case management services to children in their homes or in out-of-home placements, and, assuring children have safety and permanency in their own or other permanent homes.

Child and abuse reports for the entire state are directed to a Centralized Intake Unit in Boise for assessment, determination, and prioritization in coordination with law enforcement. The ability to take and respond to reports operates 24/7 across the state.

During state fiscal year (SFY) 2016, CFS received 22,346 referrals. Of these 8,884 were assigned for a safety assessment and 1,321 children were placed into foster care. Neglect is the most frequent referral reason. School personnel and parents are the primary reporting sources for maltreatment referrals.

The Comprehensive Safety Assessment is completed for all child protection referrals meeting the CFS priority response guidelines. If a safety threat exists, a circumstance specific safety plan is put into place.

Efforts to minimize the trauma of removing a child includes an immediate search for any fit and willing relatives for placement source. If a relative cannot be found, the child is placed either in a fictive kin or a non-relative foster care placement.

Beyond law enforcement determination of imminent danger, a department court petition can be used for removal of the child from the home. A judge determines whether or not to enter an Order of Removal. The court can also expand a Juvenile Corrections Act proceeding into a Child Protective Act (CPA) proceeding. The court has determination responsibility for removal of a child and for other key decisions as the case moves through the court process.

Over the past five years the number of children in foster care has averaged 2,477 children per year. During the 2016 SFY, 72% of 1,194 children exiting foster care were reunified with their parents. Other exit reasons included a non-relative or relative adoption, vacating foster care at age 18, transfer to another jurisdiction, and guardianship with a non-relative or relative.

The CFS strives to maintain the child in their community and with siblings. A transition plan assists the child with a planned move, including visitation and overnight visits with the new placement. Supportive services or other assistance is used to reduce foster parent placement change requests.

Social workers monitor the family's progress in achieving the service plan objectives and regularly assess the safety, permanency, and well being of the child. Court hearings review the case progress at six and twelve month post removal intervals, with additional hearings at the court's discretion. Placement determinations are subject to judicial review and approval when contested by any party. The court also finalizes all adoptions and guardianships.

The process revisions include the Standard for Comprehensive Safety, Ongoing, and Reassessment, the Concurrent Planning Standard, the Permanent Placement Selection, the Well-Being Standard, and the Infant Toddler Standard. Also being revised are the written materials provided to parents who have a child in foster care.

Implemented quarterly statewide all-staff video conferences provide ongoing communication and feedback. The Child Welfare Executive Steering Committee will ensure the strategic child welfare system transformation plan development and completion. Results from an adoptive parents survey are being compiled to identify program and policy needs. Revised court report templates include previous legislative changes and assure consistency with the comprehensive safety assessment.

During the second half of SFY 2017, CFS, along with internal and external partners, will develop a Program Improvement Plan to identify themes, trends, strengths, and target improvement areas.

Progress on the strategic plan goals has included foster parent recruitment strategies and training, work staff and leadership training, local stakeholder meeting development, Family Group Decision Making meetings, continued collaboration to include the Department in all CPA actions, and automated financial reports.

Responding to questions, **Ms. Unsworth** said there is a federal funds match for the information technology modernization and a two-year budget request to continue the project planning.

Placement rates are 26% with a relative and 41.7% with a non-relative. A standardized process for collectively supporting staff is being formalized. Additional funds have been requested to add service technicians to assist case workers in transport, visitations, and other ways to relieve their case loads.

As of July 1, 2017, a statute change provides a seven-day advance notice for any placement move if the child has been in the foster home over sixty days. When contested by any party, judicial approval is required. An unannounced move should only occur if there is a foster home safety issue.

The one-week-a-month, nine-month staff training process has specific competencies targeted. Trainers join field and embedded supervisors to offer further support. Staff surveys have indicated the need for more in-service training development, which they are pursuing with their Idaho State University contractor.

Any conflict between a foster parent and case worker not resolved by the reinstated foster parent resolution process progresses to the supervisory level and, if needed, to the central office level.

**ADJOURN:** There being no further business to come before the committee, the meeting was adjourned at 9:46 a.m.

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Representative Wood  
Chair

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Irene Moore  
Secretary