

MINUTES
SENATE HEALTH & WELFARE COMMITTEE

DATE: Wednesday, January 29, 2025

TIME: 3:00 P.M.

PLACE: Room WW54

MEMBERS PRESENT: Chair VanOrden, Vice Chairman Bjerke, Senators Harris, Zuiderveld, Lenney, Shippy, Blaylock, Keyser, and Wintrow

ABSENT/ EXCUSED: None

NOTE: The sign-in sheet, testimonies and other related materials will be retained with the minutes in the committee's office until the end of the session and will then be located on file with the minutes in the Legislative Services Library.

CONVENED: **Chair VanOrden** convened the meeting of the Senate Health and Welfare Committee (Committee) to order at 3:03 p.m.

PRESENTATION: **Child Welfare Reform Overview.** **Alex Adams**, Director of the Department of Health and Welfare (Department), presented the supplemental budget request (Attachment One). **Mr. Adams** outlined "The Child Welfare Journey," or percentages of Idaho children that interacted with the Department through home visits, foster care, or other means. He explained costs and outcomes of placements programs, iterating that the keeping children in home or with kin had the most effective outcomes. **Mr. Adams** highlighted that the ratio of foster parents to foster children varied by legislative district (Attachment Two). The Department aimed to increase foster family recruitment and leverage prevention services.

DISCUSSION: **Senator Harris** noted the handout showed his district outperformed in foster parents and asked about potential causes. **Mr. Adams** replied that people of faith were often more inclined to foster and that during the summer of 2024, the Department hosted screenings of the religious and pro-foster care film "Sound of Hope." **Senator Shippy** expounded that many neighboring states made it difficult for people of faith to become foster parents.

Senator Lenney inquired about the timeline for anticipatory budget plateaus or decreases. **Mr. Adams** responded that their budget model performed well in the Juvenile Corrections, and they forecasted the budget to level off in two years and decline thereafter.

Senator Zuiderveld asked for an update on the status of foster children in Airbnbs and how the Department would deregulate foster parents. **Mr. Adams** proudly shared that as of November 2024 there were zero foster children in Airbnbs. As for deregulation, **Mr. Adams** pointed to changes in administrative rules the Committee previously adopted. He discussed incorporating technology such as zoom for home inspection follow-ups to ease case worker load.

Senator Shippy asked about plans to increase the number of children remaining in their homes. **Monty Prow**, Deputy Director, Child, Youth, and Family Services, outlined the Department's use of concrete assistance such as food or rent support, along with therapy and substance disorder treatment to address protective factors. **Mr. Adams** added that the Department posted needs to communities in order to support families without government overreach. An opponent of government subsidies, **Senator Shippy** supported the community outreach strategy.

Senator Wintrow invited Mr. Prow to speak to decreasing out-of-state foster placement and the involvement of legal teams, such as guardianship programs. **Monty Prow** articulated that some children had specialized needs outside the State's capacity to meet. He introduced a newsletter and resource guide available in November 2025.

Senator Zuiderveld asked if President Trump's Executive Orders would affect funding of foster care. **Mr. Adams** replied the Department was mitigating risks by limiting discretionary federal grants. They forecasted that some areas such as home energy subsidies may be affected.

ADJOURNED: There being no further business at this time, **Chair VanOrden** adjourned the meeting at 3:52 p.m.

Senator VanOrden
Chair

Rebecca Kozlowski
Secretary