

December 27, 2004

Florida's Task Force on Children's Justice
1317 Winewood Blvd.
Tallahassee, FL 32399

Attn: Jacque Foster, Director

RE: Response to 2003 Review/Report/Recommendations

Dear Ms. Foster:

Thank you for the 2003 CJA report as a Citizen Review Panel. I appreciate your time and commitment to this process.

In May 2003, Florida's Task Force on Children's Justice submitted their report with recommendations for DCF/CBC's/Sheriff's regarding a number of different areas. Those recommendations have been taken seriously and responded to below. Please also note that there are some recommendations that are outside of DCF's purview that will not have a response to them in this report.

Administrative:

- 1) Issues of concern regarding training of staff. It is very important for child protection staff to have some knowledge in mental health, domestic violence and substance abuse. Currently, our pre-service training provides for domestic violence and substance abuse components. The department is in the process of developing a new pre-service training that will provide components on mental health. The department will be reassessing how we provide training for mandatory reporters and make changes as needed.
- 2) Recommendation to establish different permanency time requirements for infants versus adolescents. The Federal Law is specific in how much time is given to families, regardless of the child's age. There are some circumstances, which create a short cut of those time frames in certain cases.
- 3) Concerns about staff interactions with the court. The department and its contractors work diligently to provide guidance and training in the area of court preparedness. Cases that are going to court are staffed on a regular

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basis with Child Welfare Legal Services for content and appropriateness. Regarding consequences for employees, there continues to be policy and guidelines for disciplinary actions placed against employees.

- 4) Recommendation that each district have Live Scan Machines for fingerprinting with would facilitate a two-day turnaround, as opposed to a two-month turnaround. The panel is also recommending providing cell phones and laptop computers for protective investigators. The subject of the live scan machines will be re-addressed in the next year. The department is currently working diligently to provide cell phones and laptops to all protective investigators.
- 5) DCF should train staff on family case conferencing to include family and community resources. DCF Central Office has provided training to all of the zones around "family case conferencing". It is a good family centered practice that produces good results for families. DCF will continue to provide training and technical assistance in Florida around this program.
- 6) Suggestion that a comparison be made between the performance and longevity of child welfare staff with degrees in social work or other behavioral sciences versus other degreed staff and the recommendation that job descriptions be reviewed. The department will look at National studies and re-assess if necessary. Job descriptions were reviewed during the Protective Investigator Retention Workgroup and updated as needed. There are currently no agreements with the universities to allow for a graduate to be certified in child welfare upon graduation. The certification process is handled by the department.
- 7) Recommendation that DCF have agreements in place with local providers for the exchange of information. DCF does have agreements in place for the exchange of information regarding families with other agencies. These are mostly done at the district level relevant to individual cases.
- 8) Recommendation that there be a Statewide Guardian Ad Litem Office and that the CPT have access to case record information. A Statewide Guardian Ad Litem Office has been put in place as of January 2004. There has also been legislation addressing the need for the CPT to have access to the case record of children that they are seeing.

Investigative:

- 9) Recommendation that Protective Investigators be housed with Law Enforcement. DCF has some co-located staff with law enforcement. The barriers to this becoming a standard practice are office space costs, availability, lease expirations, etc.

- 10) Recommendation that criminal records check policy be updated to include "call for service". This issue will be looked into with law enforcement.
- 11) Recommendation that the department have the authority to issue warrants and file injunctions in certain cases. The department does have the authority to request an injunction at court pursuant to 39.504. This issue will be brought up with Child Welfare Legal Services to define the extent of its use and whether or not a reminder should be sent out to the field. Florida Statutes do not give authority for DCF to obtain civil warrants, however, at the time of the shelter hearing, the judge is able to order information be made available to complete an investigation.
- 12) Recommendation that resources be prioritized regarding the child death reviews. The department has an assigned person to the child death reviews, which should give the needed attention and promptness to the program.

The department will also make sure that copies of the report are disseminated to the other agencies and entities that are mentioned in your report.

Again, I want to thank you for your time and commitment to this process and for writing such an excellent report that was easy to read and understand. If you have any questions regarding this response, please direct your questions to Kim Grosdidier, Supervisor for Protective Investigations and In Home Services, at (850) 922-5055.

Sincerely,

Beth Englander
Director, Child Welfare & Community Based Care