



Oregon

Kate Brown, Governor

Department of Human Services

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October 3, 2016

The Honorable Kate Brown
Governor of Oregon
160 State Capitol
900 Court Street
Salem, OR 97301-4047



Dear Governor Brown:

The Department of Human Services is committed to ensuring the safety of children and youth in our care. As part of the Department's commitment, we recognize that critical improvements are needed, and have worked diligently to develop both short- and long-term solutions. The recent completion of the independent review of child safety in substitute care has contributed toward identifying critical issues, as well as recommending relevant solutions. We continue the important work towards culture change to place children and youth at the center of our child welfare decisions and actions.

However, we have been making progress since November, 2015, and have not been not waiting for the recommendations from the independent review. Improvement actions we have already taken and are actively monitoring include the following:

- 24/7 "Foster Parent Support Line" with 211info provides Oregon-specific advice, referrals and crisis intervention to foster families, especially when DHS offices are closed.
- The Licensing and Safety Review Team is well established and looking at issues across the agency for vulnerable children, youth, adults and people with intellectual/developmental disabilities. Started when I first got to DHS in November 2015.
- Important for child safety and for families to get services, 6,000 overdue assessments of child abuse/neglect were cleared.
- When a child under 4-years old has two or more reports of abuse or neglect that are "closed at screening," we now mandate opening a Child Protective Services investigation.
- A review of caseworker workload in process and includes caseworkers from across the state with real solutions.
- All DHS protective services workers in the field now have a smart phone to assist with communication and documentation; this helps us comply with Karly's Law.
- We are working with our Behavioral Rehabilitation Service providers to increase capacity and improve care, and we have made contacts with prospective providers both inside and outside of Oregon soliciting interest in providing Behavior Rehabilitation Services in Oregon.
- SB 1515 implementation changes the way the Department regulates child caring agencies and responds to reports of concerns about child safety and wellbeing.
- Additional background check personnel are decreasing the background check backlog and improving timely responses.
- Intensive monitoring and management of children and youth in emergency placements in hotels or DHS offices.
- The Centralized Hotline Workgroup is creating a plan to increase consistency in how we screen reports of abuse and neglect

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- While we are continuing discussion about rate issues, the Behavioral Rehabilitation Services rate was increased by 3% in May 2016.
- We are changing the DHS policy to allow DHS employees to foster children and youth.
- The new Child Welfare Director Lena Alhusseini begins November and brings experience and expertise in child protection.
- We are continuing to communicate messages on safety, culture change, and the importance of bringing issues to the attention of the Director's Office.

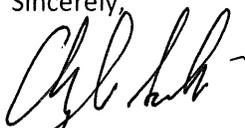
The Department is developing an improvement plan to address child safety by using information from the independent review, past Critical Incident Response Team reports, partner input, and once we receive it, the performance improvement plan based on the Child and Family Services Report findings. The plan and the implementation of the plan will result in a comprehensive system reform and will be built upon trauma-informed and culturally informed practices.

Through October, we will be meeting with key informants and partners to review the independent report and highlight partner priorities and concerns. Those will be integrated into the plan. We will also build a web site with consistent updates on the progress of the work. The plan includes regular consultation and updates with the House Committee on Human Services and Housing, with the Senate Committee on Human Services and Early Childhood, with the Foster Care (HB 4080) Commission and your office.

The independent review specifically highlighted system issues that include our limited safe placement options for children and youth and our disjointed response to reported abuse in care. We will resource our improvement plan with project managers and staff who are dedicated to focus on data, finances rules, communication, and organizational change -- all with the child and youth at the center. This work also requires prioritized focus, defined scope and dedicated staff and along with the work we have already started, priority will be given to these two areas. This work will be run out of the DHS Director's Office, and I will be partnering with members of a steering team to help guide the work.

Thank you for your attention to this important issue.

Sincerely,



Clyde Saiki
Director

CS:JB:dd

EC: Ivo Trummer
Abby Tibbs

Attachments (3)