



Oregon

Kate Brown, Governor

Department of Human Services

Office of the Director

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The Honorable Kate Brown
Office of the Governor
900 Court Street
Salem, OR 97301-4047



Dear Governor Brown:

The Secretary State's Foster Care Audit released on January 30, 2018 raised many legitimate issues about the shortcomings of Oregon's foster care system and the broader child welfare system. We are committed to the critical improvements and like you, want better outcomes for children in this state. We know we have a long road ahead of us and appreciate your support, and the support of the legislature to get right to work. We also know that we cannot delay in moving forward.

The audit's 24 recommendations for improving the system fall under four broad categories:

- Safety
- Better use of data
- Culture
- Resources

There are also sub-categories contained within the above domains including; systems, people, processes, and structure.

The purpose of this memo is to outline what DHS Child Welfare has done in relation to the above, what has been accomplished, and what progress you can expect to see in the coming months and beyond.

Safety:

Following the release of the Public Knowledge report on child safety in substitute care in Fall of 2016, Nathan Rix, Director of Executive Projects, and his team of six project managers, were hired by the DHS Director's Office to help assure DHS is focused on safety. The Executive Projects Team developed the Unified Child and Youth Safety Implementation Plan focused on the safety of children across DHS divisions. The detailed Plan can be found at: <http://www.oregon.gov/DHS/ABOUTDHS/Child-Safety-Plan/Pages/index.aspx>.

The Unified Child and Youth Safety Implementation Plan aims to achieve five strategic goals:

1. Ensure swift, safe and comprehensive response to reports of child abuse and neglect.
2. Build trust between DHS, certified families, licensed child caring agency providers, and those receiving DHS services.
3. Ensure child and youth needs are considered when delivering services, especially substitute care placement decisions.
4. Cultivate a youth-centered, safety-first culture within DHS.

"Assisting People to Become Independent, Healthy and Safe"

5. Retain, train, develop and recruit certified families and licensed child caring agency providers that meet or exceed the applicable standards for substitute care providers.

The Plan is advised and directed by a community-based steering team. The steering team prioritized ten projects to make safety-focused system improvements across the department. All ten projects focus on responsibility for child and youth safety, and over 100 community members are involved in these projects.

Each of the projects is listed below as Tasks A-J, and we have also provided a link to more information about each specific project.

<http://www.oregon.gov/DHS/ABOUTDHS/Child-Safety-Plan/Pages/projects.aspx>

- Task A. Enhancing Community Engagement
- Task B. Recruitment and Retention of Child Welfare Caseworkers
- Task C. Supervisor Training
- Task D. Fidelity to the Oregon Safety Model (OSM): Quality Review, Accountability, and Training
- Task E. Continuum of Care
- Task F. Coordinated Child Safety-Centered Response to Abuse
- Task G. Centralize Hotline Operations
- Task H. Aligning Policy, Procedure and Best Practice for Caseworkers and Supervisors
- Task I. Certification Safety and Well-Being Review Standardization (formerly Foster Home Reviews)
- Task J. Foster Parent Recruitment, Retention Support and Training

The projects schedule and progress are posted online along with who is accountable for the work, and is reported to the community-based steering team every quarter.

<http://www.oregon.gov/DHS/ABOUTDHS/Child-Safety-Plan/Documents/Project%20Status%20Reports%20January%202019%2C%202018.pdf>

Better use of data:

In the fall of 2017, we created the Office of Reporting, Research, Analytics, and Implementation (ORRAI) under the leadership of Dr. Paul Bellatty. This office will use the work from reporting and research to inform decision making and improve outcomes while ensuring the support of the field to improve outcomes for children and families. The team [built a research agenda](#) for the Department and is beginning with the child welfare program [to address categories](#) including those mentioned in previous assessments and the [Secretary of State Audit](#). The data and information coming out of the research will inform us on where to best focus our current resources and where we need more resources.

Culture:

We are making positive movement toward changing the DHS culture. My first step was hiring a new Child Welfare Director, Marilyn Jones, in October 2017. Under Marilyn's leadership Child Welfare has established the following:

New Vision, Mission and Action Statements

- Vision: Every child and family has a safe and positive environment in which to live and develop.
- Mission: Every child and family is empowered to live independent, safe and healthy lives.
- Action: Promote exceptional and equitable service by embracing opportunity for growth and providing innovative resources and support to our staff.

A Clearly Defined Action Plan

Many of the efforts underway through the Unified Child and Youth Safety Implementation Plan, The Child and Family Services Review/Program Improvement Plan and The Governor's Foster Care Commission have been pulled together in one clear Child Welfare Action Plan, which describes how DHS is aligning the child safety system's vision, mission and goals with the project work.

The Action Plan identifies the 'Keys to Success' as Data-Informed Decisions, Valued Professional Discretion, Implementation with a Focus on Service to Children and Families, and Leadership Commitment to Positive Personal Development.

The Statewide Goals are Child/Family Safety and Well-Being, System Alignment, Service Intervention Effectiveness and Community Engagement; and key elements of the Action Plan include:

- Children are safe and healthy in their own families and communities.
- The child and family serving system is "right-sized" and operates effectively, efficiently, and uses data and research to inform decision-making.
- A competent, engaged, supported and valued workforce further strengthens DHS as a caring and supportive organization.
- DHS employs a connected and collective community-based approach to ensure children and families receive the best services.

Statewide Community Forums

As one of the projects within the Unified Child and Youth Safety Implementation Plan, Marilyn and I are visiting areas throughout the state during the months of January, February and March 2018. [During these visits](#), we are engaging with partners about what can be done better in Child Welfare. Stakeholders include local Child Welfare staff, foster/adoptive parents, youth who have experienced foster care, attorneys, elected officials, CASAs, Tribal representatives, law enforcement, service providers, educators, and interested community members.

Employee Suggestions

We are asking staff to engage and work together to improve the Child Welfare system. An email address was recently established (CW-Staff.Suggestions@dhsosha.state.or.us) for staff to submit ideas for follow up by agency leadership.

Process Mapping

We are currently working to develop a mapping process that will help describe the work we do, how we do it, and how we know we are doing it well. This will help everyone in the program, from the field to the central office, clearly see how they contribute to the overall work of Child Welfare and will help inform the program's quality assurance efforts.

Resources:

The audit identifies a significant need for additional caseworkers, supervisors, and support staff. The department's workload modeling has been recently moved under Office of Reporting, Research, Analytics and Implementation. Child Welfare will work closely with this team to develop a workload model that accurately reflects the tasks and time required to do the work. We will present our findings to you by summer of 2018.

We are also actively working on the remainder of the audit recommendations. We will be reporting our progress to you monthly beginning this month.

Our new Child Welfare Director, Marilyn Jones, has hit the ground running. With just over five months on the job, she has made a noticeable positive difference in staff morale and has begun to bridge the gap between the field and central office. We have heard from Child Welfare front line staff and supervisors that for the first time in years, they are beginning to see signs of hope and progress toward a better future.

You are going to be seeing improvements in the next few months. We are addressing our structure issues as we address our workforce challenges. We have been laser-focused on project work and are now starting on research and nurturing a much-needed culture shift. We are working across systems to be a part of the solutions that span across agencies and across the state.

Though many challenges remain and transforming Child Welfare will take time and additional resources, great work is happening every day due to resilience of our staff who keep kids safe and support foster parents and families. Last year 2134 children left foster care and were reunited with their parents, 637 were adopted into caring and supportive households, and we added 381 foster homes for children who need safe places to grow and thrive. We are seeing a significant increase in foster parent inquiries. We are also working with providers and Coordinated Care Organizations to explore options for reducing and eliminating the use of hotels for children who lack appropriate placement.

I have included several links to this letter to show the work already underway and the work we are starting now. Thank you for continued commitment to this important work.

Sincerely,



Fariborz Pakseresht
Director

EC: Nik Blosser, Berri Leslie, Ivo Trummer, Debbie Koreski, Rosa Klein

Links:

1. Unified Child and Youth Safety Implementation Plan www.oregonchildsafetyplan.org
2. Project Status Summary <http://www.oregon.gov/DHS/ABOUTDHS/Child-Safety-Plan/Documents/Project%20Status%20Reports%20January%2019%2C%202018.pdf>
3. Community Forums <http://www.oregon.gov/DHS/ABOUTDHS/Child-Safety-Plan/Pages/projectA-community-engagement.aspx>
4. Child Welfare Research Agenda - <http://www.oregon.gov/DHS/ABOUTDHS/DataDocuments/Child-Welfare-Research-Agenda.pdf>
5. Child Welfare Research Priorities <http://www.oregon.gov/DHS/ABOUTDHS/DataDocuments/Child-Welfare-Research-Priorities.pdf>
6. Secretary of State Audit and DHS responses <http://www.oregon.gov/DHS/CHILDREN/Pages/cw-audit.aspx>