

Date: June 5, 2019

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DHS responds to Secretary of State’s follow-up report on foster care audit

(SALEM, OR.) – Today the Oregon Secretary of State released a [follow-up report](#) to its January 2018 [audit](#) of the foster care system. The report assesses the progress of the Oregon Department of Human Services (DHS) in addressing the 24 recommendations from the original audit to improve child safety in the foster care system. With eight of the 24 recommendations implemented and the remainder partially implemented, the report concludes that DHS has made important improvements, and extensive work remains.

“We are encouraged by the report and appreciate its acknowledgment of the steady and significant progress we’ve made in the last 18 months to bring stability to our Child Welfare program to create the foundation we need to both implement the Secretary of State’s recommendations and sustain the improvements they bring in child safety,” said Fariborz Pakseresht, DHS director. “We remain committed to full implementation of every audit recommendation.”

The original audit presented recommendations in three areas: Management practices, foster parent retention and recruitment, and staffing issues including chronic understaffing, workload and retention. Currently, Child Welfare workers carry caseloads two times the national standard.

Pakseresht said DHS leaders are giving the follow-up report careful review to confirm priorities and make any needed adjustments in the next phase of work to complete implementation of the audit recommendations. The use of research, data and stakeholder feedback is front and center in the work to ensure the agency is solving the root cause of problems. It contributes to the accurate estimation of the type and amount of resources DHS needs to get and sustain positive results and defines the capacity Oregon must develop to provide foster children with the placements that best meet their needs.

“We are in the early stages of reforming a child safety system that’s been struggling to care for Oregon’s vulnerable children and families for years. The report confirms for us that we’re on the right path, but substantial work remains ahead,” Pakseresht said. “For long-term success, we must keep our focus steady, earn the investments we need to get the work done, and continue building community partnerships to help us meet the needs of Oregon’s foster children and those who care for them.”

Child Welfare Director Marilyn Jones said there are 7,546 children in foster care today.

“We aim to create a child safety system where we can wrap supports around at-risk families in their communities to create safety and well-being, so they can stay together and out of the foster care system. And when children can’t stay safely with their families, we need a foster care system where every child has a placement that meets their own unique needs, so they can heal and thrive in a safe, healthy and caring environment,” Jones said.

“The only way we can achieve that is through strong partnerships and we appreciate all who have given their help so far and we look forward to expanding that support for Oregon’s children and families,” she said.

If you would like to get involved with supporting Oregon foster children and foster families, visit helpafosterchild.oregon.gov.

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