

October 22, 2018

*The following information is being provided by Kansas Department for Children and Families (DCF) Secretary Gina Meier-Hummel to update the Child Welfare System Task Force on the agency.*

## **Chairwoman Schmidt, Vice Chair Davis and Members of the Committee:**

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak with you today. I know the Child Welfare System Task Force will be delving into all the recommendations today. Before doing so, I wanted to provide an update on the agency since our last meeting. First, I would like to provide data on the number of one-night placement, which was requested at the last task force meeting. Below are the numbers of youth who have experienced one-night placement since April 2018. As you will see, there has been a steady decrease in the number of youth in one-night placements. In the past several months, DCF has added approximately 150 beds to the continuum of care, which has led to more placement stability and a decrease in one-night placements. We anticipate adding approximately 50 more beds by the end of the year to continue to strengthen our systems. Placement stability will continue to improve with the addition of more residential beds to the system.

### **KVC Kansas**

<b>Month</b>	<b>Number of Children in One Night Placements</b>
April	156
May	127
June	85
July	106
August	126
September	95
October	15

### **Saint Francis Community Services (SFCS)**

<b>Month</b>	<b>Number of Children in One Night Placements</b>
April	161
May	158
June	113
July	118
August	125
September	89
October	47

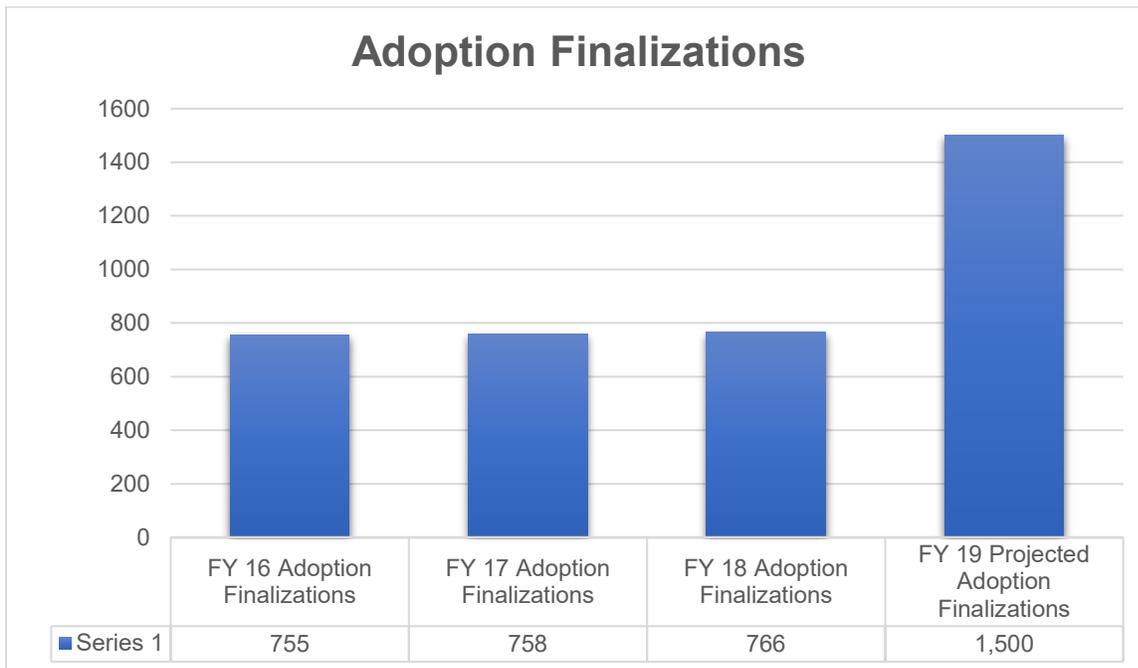
While DCF still has youth in one-night placements, the practice of children sleeping overnight in offices has effectively stopped. The last time a youth stayed overnight in office for SFCS was Sept. 20, 2018, and Sept. 1, 2018 for KVC. I understand the agency received some pushback regarding this issue. Critics were quick to say enforcing fines on an already underfunded system wasn't the answer. While I agree the entire child welfare system has been underfunded and neglected for many years, enforcing financial penalties on this practice was necessary to create another layer of accountability. DCF must walk a balanced line, holding contractors accountable, and supporting them and working with them in partnership to help address this issue. Since my arrival at the agency, I have worked diligently with our contractors to end the practice of youth staying overnight in offices. On almost a weekly basis, we have had conversations with contractors to help remove barriers for youth in need of placement. While the contractors are responsible for these youth, ultimately, they are in my custody, and as a mother, I would never want my children to sleep in an office. At some point, the agency had to draw a line in the sand that clearly illustrated this practice is unacceptable. I am happy to report the agency has not had to enforce a financial penalty on KVC or SFCS since the policy was instituted.

Another positive decrease at the agency has been the child welfare vacancy rate. As of Oct. 8, 2018, the child protection specialist vacancy rate was 10.3 percent. This illustrates a 1 percent decrease since last month. Overall in the past five months, the vacancy rate has dropped from 20.7 percent. While child protection specialist vacancies have dropped from 20.7 percent to 10.3 percent in the past six months, caseloads have not dropped as dramatically because once hired, staff must undergo training and then gradually acquire a full caseload. We anticipate the caseloads will continue to drop as we continue to fill vacancies. Although, as the Annie E. Casey Foundation report illustrated, we are still in need of additional positions because caseloads are still too high. The agency has requested funding for additional funding in the upcoming budget to help address this issue.

DCF has also seen a decrease in the number of runaway youth. On August 31, 2017, there were 86 missing or runaway youth. Comparatively, on August 31, 2018, there were 63, representing a 26.7 percent decrease in the number of missing and runaway youth. While the number of youth who have run away from placement continues to fluctuate daily, DCF has consistently seen lower numbers, as a result of recent agency initiatives. DCF will continue to actively look for these youth because even one child missing from placement is one too many. While we have seen a decrease in the number of youth in running away from placement, we experienced a slight increase in the number of youth in out of home care in September. This increase, which is a result of children going back to school and encountering more mandated reporters, comes after five months of a steady decrease of youth in out of home care. In August 2018, there were 7,494 youth in care. In September 2018, there were 7,530 youth in out of home placement. While we have experienced a slight increase, we still have working plans in place to significantly and safely lower the number of youth in out of home care by the end of the year.

At the last task force meeting, we provided an update about the many adoption initiatives currently in place, and there were questions about adoption finalization numbers. Thus, below we have provided a snapshot of adoption finalizations since July 2017. Recently, the agency identified and removed policies that were serving as barrier to timely permanency and reviewed all cases where you were awaiting adoption. In the next 90 days, we anticipate finalizing hundreds of adoptions.

Month	Adoptions Finalized
July 2017	51
August 2017	54
September 2017	44
October 2017	61
November 2017	165
December 2017	46
January 2018	29
February 2018	39
March 2018	58
April 2018	66
May 2018	74
June 2018	79
July 2018	110
August 2018	99



Lastly, before I move on to addressing recommendations, I would like to provide an update about the upcoming Case Management and Family Preservation Grants, as well as the Juvenile Crisis Intervention Centers. DCF has already conducted negotiations and we anticipate awarding these grants by the end of October. To ensure a smooth transition, we have set up an internal and external link where staff and the public can provide feedback and suggestions about the transition. Specifically, we are hoping individuals who experienced the last transition will help us identify what went wrong and what went right to ensure a smooth transition and a continuity of services for those we serve.

Following House Substitute for Senate Bill 179, DCF is in the process of establishing Juvenile Crisis Intervention Centers (JCICs). These centers will provide short-term observation, assessment and treatment services to youth who are likely to harm themselves or others. Currently, we have posted the draft regulations for these facilities on our public website along with an online form, allowing for the public to weigh in. DCF will also be holding a public comment hearing soon. Simultaneously, we have posted the Request for Proposal (RFP) for the centers. Currently, there is a population of our youth who are in need of mental health treatment centers, and the Juvenile Crisis Intervention Centers will help fulfill their needs. The agency anticipates establishing approximately 35-40 beds statewide. You can find links to both the child welfare grant transition feedback and JCICs at [www.dcf.ks.gov/Agency/pubcomments/Pages/default.aspx](http://www.dcf.ks.gov/Agency/pubcomments/Pages/default.aspx).

As I've previously discussed, the new child welfare grants will be drastically different than the current contracts. These changes were made to improve quality services to Kansas children and families and oversight, eliminate conflicts of interest and provide client-centered care and needs-based services. Internally, the agency will establish oversight teams, which will oversee the contracts to ensure quality services for Kansas families. We have provided Attachment 1—Child Welfare Grants and Contracts—to illustrate the changes in more detail. The attachment also includes information about the Placement Matching System, which is a vital piece of how our agency will be moving differently in the future. This contract will require every licensed foster home or residential bed, to be entered into a single system, regardless of which Child Placing Agency (CPA) sponsors the home. Additionally, this system will capture the placement abilities and characteristics. When a child is in need of placement, the system will look at all open, licensed beds, that meet a child's needs in a given zip code, and it will provide the top three to five placements. If these placements don't work, the search criteria are expanded until placement is found. Currently, each provider has its own separate system, and the state does not readily have available data. This new system will ensure foster homes, who can meet a child's needs, will be called, regardless of sponsoring agency. The child welfare grants and contracts will be effective July 1, 2019. The agency has also released two additional child welfare Request for Proposals (RFPs)—Caregiver Support Association and Family Support Network. These two grants will provide much-needed services to biological, foster and caregiver families, as well as establish an advisory board made up of youth in custody, biological families, foster parents, providers and aged-out youth to communicate directly with the DCF Secretary.

The advisory board will provide updates, suggestions and feedback to improve how the agency serves the children and families of Kansas.

I would like to reiterate my recommendations on what improvements the child welfare system needs. I know I have communicated this information to you before, but I want to talk about them at every opportunity provided because I believe they are vital to strengthen our system. First and foremost, it is crucial and vitally important to overhaul the child welfare computer systems (CCWIS). Our current system was built 30 years ago, prior to the internet, and it is on a mainframe system. Current IT staff are unable to fix issues that arise with our system because it is so outdated. The current system is a barrier to our staff, and ultimately, puts children in danger. Upgrading our computer systems is a top priority. DCF has submitted the first portion of the feasibility study, Planning Advance Planning Document, and we will continue to work with our federal partners to ensure the feasibility study is done as quickly and as thoroughly as possible, allowing us to have an improved information system that much sooner.

Secondly, implementing Family First will require a major initial investment of an estimated \$5 million budget enhancement. Understandably, this is a large ask, but this legislation will drastically change child welfare in Kansas. Research suggests foster care should be used as a last resort, and only for a specific amount of the child welfare population. When this is not done properly, putting a child into foster care oftentimes does more harm than good. Family First will keep children from entering the foster care system, and keep them at home with their families, which is the right thing to do. It will bring evidenced-based, preventative services to Kansas in an innovative way. We fully intend to implement this legislation, and believe it is a vital part of improving the child welfare system.

Thirdly, DCF requested a pay differential for protection specialists. While it was denied by the 2018 Legislature, we still believe additional resources for staff are necessary. Additionally, we are requesting additional child welfare positions in the upcoming budget. Having worked in child welfare for much of my career, I understand firsthand the challenges and hardships protection specialists face every day. It is a difficult world to work in, which is why we must continue to advocate for our staff. Being able to recruit and retain staff is vital to ensuring child safety in Kansas.

I would like to express my gratitude for the Child Welfare System Task Force and subsequent working groups for coming alongside the agency to improve child welfare in Kansas. The work you have done on behalf of Kansas children and families is admirable and does not go unnoticed. I understand fully, the time, work and good intent put behind each recommendation. Although, there are some recommendations the agency does not support, as we believe they will not help improve the child welfare system or will be overly burdensome to the system. We have provided Attachment 2, which details the recommendations we oppose. I hope you will take our input into consideration as you finalize your report to the Legislature. We have also provided Attachment 3, which remedies the mandatory language of the recommendations. Using shall is mandatory language, and if the State does not perform the mandated function, it is opening up the State to liability and litigation. Comparatively, "may" allows for discretion. Along with this attachment, we have provided another attachment with all the

recommendations, our response and an estimated fiscal impact (Attachment 4). Our internal budget division has thoroughly researched and evaluated each recommendation and provided an estimated fiscal impact. It is important to keep these numbers in mind as you are finalizing your final report as well.

Thank you for allowing me to weigh in on the recommendations and provide you an update on the agency. While I present a DCF monthly update at each task force meeting, I am happy to answer questions you may have at any time between these meetings. If you don't have my contact information, please let me know and I will give you my card. As the DCF Secretary, I work on behalf of the public, and as such I want to be as accessible and open as possible. Thank you again for caring about the children and families of Kansas. There is much to be done to improve the Kansas child welfare system, but together, I know we can truly make a positive impact across the state. I am happy to stand for questions. Thank you.