



DATE: July 22, 2015

TO: Minnesota Citizen Review Panel Members

FROM: Jamie Sorenson
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SUBJECT: Minnesota Department of Human Services' Response to the Minnesota Citizen Review Panels' "2014 Annual Report"

The following is a response from the Minnesota Department of Human Services to the Minnesota Citizen Review Panels' "2014 Annual Report" regarding selected activities.

Chisago County Citizen Review Panel:

As its main project, panel members surveyed Chisago County Human Services staff regarding their perceptions of secondary trauma, its impact on workers, and the need for support regarding secondary trauma exposure. The introduction to the survey describes the changing environment of child protection, "As the community learns more about the wide impact of trauma on child development, physical health, mortality, etc., social workers are changing their practice to accommodate this new information." Chisago County workers are asking clients about trauma, and learning more about its impact on the families with whom they work. As a result, workers are hearing and seeing much more about some of the traumatic situations that families deal with in Chisago County.

- "Is this increased exposure to trauma affecting caseworkers and their ability to be available to their clients?"
- If so, what can be done to support them in their critical role as a child protection worker?"

Recommendations

Survey results indicated that, in general, workers do perceive secondary stress as a critical issue affecting their ability to continue to perform at a high level. Consequently, three recommendations intended to ameliorate secondary trauma were developed by the panel:

- Implement a strategy that includes having county board members shadow social workers at work. This could provide Board Members with a greater understanding of how difficult the work of social workers can be. This is based on comments staff made in the survey that board members who make policies do not understand social workers' situations. This could also help workers feel valued and could decrease the high turn-over rate.
- Set aside time during the workday for 'decompression.'" Ideas for decompression include fitness time or on-site yoga.
- Implement Critical Stress Debriefing Incident (CISD) which is already used in other areas (such as police and emergency responders).

Department Response

The department supports maintaining experienced social workers and assisting them in consistent improvement in practice. The department offers several trainings for child protection workers. The Minnesota Child Welfare Training System specifically offers an eight hour training on secondary trauma for child protections workers. If Chisago County management would like to offer this training to its workers, they can contact Andrea Bartels at 651-431-4681. The training can be held at a convenient site in Chisago County. Department staff is interested in future plans the county has to support and maintain workers dealing with the effects of secondary trauma exposure in the workplace. Department staff will develop best practice guidance for use statewide regarding secondary trauma exposure and recommended practices, and welcomes involvement of the panel, members in development of this guidance.

Department staff thanks the Chisago County Panel for this work, and the additional work it has done in the last year. That work includes, but is not limited to, presenting at the Child Safety and Permanency Division staff meeting, attending trainings, engaging with the Governor's Task Force for the Protection of Children, and contributing to reconsiderations of child maltreatment determinations at the county level.

Hennepin County Citizen Review Panel:

In 2014, the panel devoted significant effort to tracking the progress of, and providing direct input to, the Governor's Task Force on the Protection of Children.

Other work included:

- A review of the full set of Citizen Review Panel recommendations and concerns since 2009
- A review of data from other states regarding the use of prior child protection history during intake and screening of reports of child abuse or neglect
- Preventing child abuse and neglect of children birth to 3 – the first year of a two-year project
- Participation on the department's advisory committee for its Youth at Risk of Homelessness planning grant.

Overall Recommendations

The focus for overall recommendations for 2014 is to reiterate and emphasize key themes in concerns and recommendations the panel has reported since 2010. Panel members believes these themes are still

highly relevant, particularly as Minnesota examines critical areas needing improvement, and opportunities for strengthening the state's child protection system. The panel recommends that both Hennepin County and the department consider these recommendations again.

The panel's key themes, concerns and recommendations are:

- Concerns about how child protection intake/screening occurs, and that prior history is not considered as part of the decision to screen a report in or out
- Panel has repeatedly, strongly recommended expanding the intake process to consider prior child protection history when making final decisions to screen out or assign to the Family Assessment Response or Traditional Investigation Response tracks
- Panel members again examined the topic of intake and screening in 2014, focusing on a review of state statutes, policies, and guidance in other states regarding how prior history is handled in intake and screening decisions; see the separate section of this report for the findings of that review. Minnesota appears to be the only state that prohibits the use of information about prior history at intake
- Raising concerns over multiple years about data systems, data quality, data/file destruction, and the challenges involved in obtaining aggregate data from the state and county data systems
- The panel has made multiple recommendations over many years regarding the need for the Minnesota Department of Human Services and Hennepin County to improve the quality and reliability of data, to extend data/file retention timelines, and to significantly increase the capacity to extract aggregate and longitudinal data reports on child protection and child welfare data
- Raising concerns over how Family Assessment is being implemented, particularly regarding whether or not counties are implementing Family Assessment with fidelity to the true model of Family Assessment.

The panel has recommended strengthening implementation of Family Assessment in multiple ways, including if:

- There are multiple future reports after no engagement, change from Family Assessment to the Family Investigation track
- A family has recent history, especially resulting in a Child in Need of Protection or Services (CHIPS) case, have full review of prior cases before a case is ruled out or assigned to Family Assessment.
- Prior history shows the same problems are continuing in a family, consider the Family Investigation Response.

Note: The panel members are encouraged by the changes that Hennepin County made over the past two years regarding implementing Family Assessment, and plan to do a more in-depth review of the program again in a future year to see whether the new approach results in improved practice

Key themes in the panel's concerns and recommendations from 2010 – 2013 are:

Recommendations Regarding Prior Reports

The panel repeatedly raised concerns about how child protection intake/screening occurs, and that prior history is not considered as part of the decision to screen a report in or out, including the panel:

- Has repeatedly, strongly recommended expanding the intake process to consider prior child protection history when making final decisions to screen out or assign to the Family Assessment Response or Family Investigation Response tracks.
- Examined again the topic of intake and screening in 2014, focusing on a review of state statutes, policies, and guidance in other states regarding how prior history is handled in intake and screening decisions; see the separate section of this report for the findings of that review. Minnesota appears to be the only state that prohibits the use of information about prior history at intake.

Department Response

The state statute regarding the use of screened out prior reports has been changed due to recommendations from the Governor's Task Force on the Protection of Children. The statute was changed in the 2015 legislative session; and a bulletin was sent to counties and tribes that included the following information,

“B. Screening practice

Timing: The local welfare agency shall determine if a report is to be screened in or out as soon as possible, but no longer than 24 hours after a report is received.

History: When determining whether a report will be screened in or out, an agency receiving a report must consider, when relevant, all previous history, including reports that were screened out. An agency may communicate with treating professionals and individuals as defined in Minnesota Statutes, section 626.556, subdivision 10, paragraph (i), clause (3), item (iii), in making a decision.”

The Intake, Screening and Response Path Assignment Guidelines work group will revise the guidelines based on recommendations of the Governor's Task Force on the Protection of Children, and on statutory changes made during the 2015 legislative session. The review, revision, and establishment of clear child protection intake, screening and track assignment guidelines must be completed no later than Oct. 1, 2015.

In addition, the work group will:

- Assist in implementation planning for increased opportunities for early intervention to families with screened-out reports of alleged child abuse and neglect
- Assist department staff in implementing practices for meeting the cultural needs of children and families within the intake, screening and track assignment decision-making process
- Participate in the review, revision or replacement of Structured Decision Making instruments to assess safety and risk during the first 45 days of a child protection services response
- Assist department staff in implementing a definition for substantial child endangerment, and identifying items requiring legislative action

- Work with department staff to develop a long-term plan for designing and implementing response protocols for child abuse and neglect allegations involving domestic violence and prenatal exposure to drugs or alcohol.

Recommendations Regarding Data Systems

The panel has repeatedly raised concerns over multiple years about data systems, data quality, data/file destruction, and the challenges involved in obtaining aggregate data from the state and county data systems, which include: The panel has made multiple recommendations over many years regarding the need for the Minnesota Department of Human Services and Hennepin County to improve the quality and reliability of data, to extend data/file retention timelines, and to significantly increase the capacity to extract aggregate and longitudinal data reports on child protection and child welfare data.

DHS Response

The 2015 Legislature passed a law that changed the retention rate for screened-out reports, Family Assessment and Investigation cases with no determination or need for child protection services.

Minn. Stat. 626.556, subd. 11c, Chapter 71, section 98, modifies retention requirements as follows:

- Retention requirements for screened-out reports, Family Assessment , and Family Investigation cases which did not result in a maltreatment determination or determination of the need for child protective services to 5-five years from the date the report was not accepted, or the final entry in the case
Requires that records of screened-out reports contain information to identify the subject of the report, the nature of the alleged maltreatment, and reasons why the report was not accepted deletes provision requiring retention of screened-out reports for 365 days.

In addition, the Governor’s Task Force made recommendations related to improved data quality to support streamlined screening, acceptance and transfer of alleged child maltreatment reports. This specific recommendation would require local county and tribal child welfare agencies to take a report, even if that agency is not responsible for screening of a particular report because of jurisdictional issues. The information would be received and immediately referred to the appropriate jurisdiction of the agency with screening responsibility. Social Service Information System would be modified to create a drop-down selection for “transfer” to reflect the protocol of processing these reports. The Task Force also recommended the SSIS system be updated so that data and reporting is accurate and trustworthy, and that opportunities for effective case management and efficient use of human resources is greatly improved. The department will be addressing these recommendations with an upcoming work group structure.

Panel recommendations regarding Family Assessment include:

- Concerns over how Family Assessment is being implemented, particularly regarding whether or not counties are implementing Family Assessment with fidelity to the true model of Family Assessment
- Strengthening implementation of Family Assessment in multiple ways, including if:
 - There are multiple future reports after no engagement, change from Family Assessment to the Family Investigation track.

- Family has recent history, especially resulting in a Child in Need of Protection or Services case ensure a full review of prior cases before a case is ruled out or assigned to Family Assessment.
- Prior history shows the same problems are continuing in a family, consider the Family Investigation Response.

Note: Panel members are encouraged by the changes that Hennepin County made over the past two years regarding implementing Family Assessment, and plan to do a more in-depth review of the program again in a future year to see whether the new approach for implementing the program has improved the program and addressed past concerns.

Department Response

The Governor's Task Force on the Protection of Children discussed Family Assessment in depth and issued multiple recommendations regarding what would become Differential Response. These recommendations will be prioritized for implementation within the work of the upcoming steering committee and within the Intake, Screening and Response Path Assignment work group developed under guidance of the department's commissioner. Some recommendations are very similar to those made by the Hennepin County Citizen Review Panel.

Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect in Children Ages Birth to 3

The prevention of child abuse and neglect in children ages birth to 3 project is a two-year effort by the Hennepin County Citizens Review Panel begun in 2014.

As the project continues in its second year, the intention is to identify those issues that create the broadest impacts but zero in on recommendations that are specific, actionable, and most likely to result in positive change, both in the system and for clients. The final report will include comprehensive information derived from interviews, literature reviews, data, and all sources used for this project. It is intended that the preliminary report be short and concise.

Department Response

Department staff read the preliminary report on the prevention of child abuse among children birth to age 3 with great interest. Many of the strategies took into account real situations of families with young children, and presented both primary and secondary prevention strategies. This approach would probably result in both great success and cost savings. Department staff look forward to the final recommendations for this project. Department staff has one recommendation for the project team. Many of the families may be in the Hennepin County service system in other areas, for example, public health and Minnesota Family Investment Project. The project team may want to consider encouraging Hennepin County staff to work across departmental lines on this project.

Final Recommendation

In addition to the key themes from the panel's recommendations over multiple years, its members also encourage the Minnesota Department of Human Services and Hennepin County to continue to actively engage the Citizen Review Panel and for the department to engage all of the Citizen Review Panels or representatives from the panels in all major initiatives. Members believe it is particularly important to include Citizen Review Panels as the state and county implement reforms as a result of the Governor's Task Force on the Protection of Children. Both the department and Hennepin County have a great

opportunity to leverage the commitment, expertise, and engagement of Citizen Review Panel members to support and assess implementation of child welfare reforms.

Department Response

Department staff highly values both the current work and potential contributions of the Hennepin County panel. Hennepin has a strong panel both in terms of talent and experience in and out of the child protection system. It has shown an ability to focus on critical issues in the system in the past. Given the challenges and changes to the child protection system in the coming years, department staff will continue to listen to panel members, as well as be innovative in working with the panel. The department will also have representation on a Hennepin County oversight committee, which will meet for several months to guide activities within a recently issued department Action Plan for Hennepin County to make improvements in front-end child protection practices and workforce support.

Ramsey County Citizen Review Panel

The Ramsey County panel's primary focus in 2014 was the case file review project. This project included case reviews and interviews with youth, currently in child protection in Ramsey County, their caregivers and social workers. The project was done in 2005, 2014 and will be done again in 2015 to provide a basis for comparison of Independent Living Plan service provision to youth. This age group was selected because of the panel's concern about youth in transition, or youth who would be "aging out" of the system soon. Gathering this data presented difficulties, particularly involving communication with Ramsey County staff, but the panel and county staff continued to work on issues and data collection was successfully completed. Many useful findings were found in the casefile review project. Subsequently, the panel was able to avoid past difficulties and developed a process that was quick and yielded complete and useable information in the coming year, 2015.

This panel has also been alert to the issue of decreased resources available to Ramsey County staff over the past 10 years and tried various approaches to maintain support and advocacy for adequate funding for child protection in Ramsey County. This will remain an area of focus in the future.

Overall Recommendations for the Minnesota Department of Human Services Include:

Information gathered from the case file reviews should be used by the Minnesota Department of Human Services to update the Independent Living Plan (ILP) form, improve training for social workers regarding the ILP and to review current policies and strategies regarding youth transitioning from placement to independent living.

Department Response

Department's Adolescent Services Unit staff members are interested in any thoughts or recommendations that the panel has regarding the Independent Living Plan and case manager training as a continuous quality improvement process.

The Department staff welcome an invitation from the panel to the Adolescent Services Unit staff and /or Minnesota Child Welfare Training System staff to attend an upcoming meeting to discuss expectations for youth services and/or ILP improvements, and/or case manager training issues. The department's liaison will help facilitate the meeting.

2. The panel requests a written response from the commissioner or designee concerning the above recommendations by the end of the second quarter of 2015.

Department Response

DHS plans to have the completed response to the panel by its August meeting.

Recommendations for Ramsey County and Minnesota Department of Human Services

Regarding Independent Living Plans

Housing

Homelessness becomes an issue for many youth leaving care. The Citizen Review Panel recommends that Ramsey County staff seek additional good housing options for youth leaving care, or staying in care until age 21. Youth need strong staff support finding and maintaining acceptable housing. This must be more comprehensively addressed, and include housing for families. The panel will advocate for better housing options.

Department Response

The department has submitted a proposal to the federal government aimed at decreasing the number of youth who leave care and become homeless. It will learn if the proposal will be funded in fall 2015. Counties around the state also struggle with helping youth plan how to access housing when they leave care. One short term, but helpful solution is that the county help youth maintain housing support by enrolling them in the extended care program. This program allows youth to receive foster care support from the county up to their 22nd birthday. There are requirements that youth must fulfill for this funding. While a youth is in extended care, the county is actively involved in helping them secure safe and affordable housing.

Counties do this in various ways, depending on the housing environment in various staff share this information.

Education

County staff should assist youth plan for their long-term educational goals beginning their freshman year of high school. Communication on goal attainment among social worker, youth and school staff should occur at least twice a year to keep youth on track to graduate from high school on time, and to move on to successful post-secondary education, if appropriate.

Department Response

DHS agrees with the above points made by the panel. Requirements for obtaining extended care include being enrolled in a secondary or post-secondary educational program.

Department staff are also working on various ways to maintain adolescents in care in school. The Independent Living Plan also stresses planning for long-term educational goals, and keeping educational options open. In the ILP, the department recommends that planning begin when a youth is age 14. Department staff are interested in specific recommendations from the panel for improvement in this area.

The department has federal funding for youth who enroll in post-secondary education: the Education and Training Voucher or ETV program. Department staff work closely with staff at Ramsey County regarding each youth's needs and plans for post-secondary education. The department would definitely like to continue and improve this relationship.

Money Management

Before a youth leaves the child protection system, they should have a good understanding of the costs of being on their own (housing, food, insurance, etc.), as well as an understanding of what a credit report is and how it affects their future.

Department Response

This requirement is also included in the ILP. Various agency programs funded by the Adolescent Services Unit have hands-on educational units for working with adolescents around this topic that are successful and popular, otherwise this topic can seem very dry and uninteresting to adolescents. Department staff will discuss these units with Ramsey County or the panel.

The department has implemented a program recently mandated by the federal government, in which the department checks the credit report of each youth in care at least once per year. If there are problems with a report, department staff provides that information to county staff who work with youth to correct it.

Driver's Education and Driver's License

Only one youth in the case file reviews had a driver's license and access to a vehicle. This continues to be an issue because caregivers are either unable or unwilling to pay for auto insurance for youth. Ramsey County staff will do research on options for auto insurance for youth.

Department Response

The Adolescent Services staff have addressed this in the past. Department staff will research the issue and provide more comprehensive information to County staff and the panel regarding the insurance issue in fall 2015.

Health Insurance

Youth leaving care have been awarded Medical Assistance coverage until age 26 under the Affordable Care Act, but don't have a good understanding of their coverage, how to continue it, and what to do when they leave the system. The panel would like to see public service announcements educating youth

in foster care, and former youth who were in foster care regarding the Affordable Care Act and their access to it.

Department Response

DHS agrees that more public awareness about this relatively recent benefit for former foster youth is needed. It is important because the medical coverage extends to age 26, and many youth who are eligible may have already left care and are not aware of the new coverage. Adolescent Service staff will take the lead on this project and update the Ramsey County panel of their progress by Jan. 1, 2016.

Department staff is appreciative of the understanding, focus and hard work, the Ramsey County panel has regarding its work in 2014. This includes a willingness to respond and participate in the work of the Governor's Task Force on the Protection of Children, and ongoing work with youth transitioning out of care in Ramsey County, in addition to many other issues. The panel is very analytical and willing to approach the work from various perspectives until it finds a solution that improves outcomes for children and youth.

Washington County Citizen Review Panel

The Washington County panel decided to focus work on the effects of trauma on the development of children, and the impact of trauma on children and families. In particular, the panel was interested in Washington County's ability to provide trauma-informed services to children and families served by the child protection system.

The panel used the Chadwick Center for Children and Families Trauma-informed Systems Project materials and the National Child Traumatic Stress Network's materials to guide the work.

The panel decided to focus attention on the National Child Traumatic Stress Network's Bench Card developed for Trauma-informed judges. The panel determined that this Bench Card was very comprehensive, but it might be better utilized if the panel could draft an abbreviated version modeled after the Minnesota Children's Justice Initiative "Babies Can't Wait Courtroom Checklist." The panel developed two draft versions of the Bench Card, the shorter version recommended for Judges and the longer version could serve as a guide for child protection workers.

Using materials from the National Child Traumatic Stress Network, the panel drafted, and county staff produced a brochure for families on the topic of trauma. Panel members also actively participated in the Governor's Task Force on the Protection of Children by testifying and writing letters to the editor. It published several thought-provoking articles regarding the Governor's Task Force and a first person account of a participant in the child protection system picked up by numerous media outlets.

Department Response

Department staff is very appreciative of the work of the panel regarding trauma-informed practices, and related products produced to ensure and standardize the use of this critical concept. Trauma-informed

care is seen as a key tool in remediation of the trauma suffered by children removed from their home in the child protection system. The panel's work supports the work of Washington County child protection and creates awareness of trauma throughout the county and metropolitan area. The Washington County Citizen Review Panel is a thoughtful and skilled group of citizens committed to the support and enhancement of the work of the child welfare system.

Winona County Citizen Review Panel

The Winona County panel has been active in a wide variety of activities. Its major project was development of guidelines and protocols to enable parents and children in placement to have safe, productive, timely, meaningful supervised visits. These guidelines achieved several key outcomes which were to:

- Write visitation guidelines and protocols for Winona County Community Services
- Develop resources to enhance supervised visits
- Progress in meeting the recommendations from the Child and Family Service Review (CFSR) in the area of child and family visitation
- Promote reunification of birth parents with their children in placement, using visitation protocols and guidelines that are in the best interests of a child, developmentally appropriate, safe for all family members involved, consistent and regular, meaningful, culturally sensitive and accessible.

Panel members also participated in a thoughtful and productive manner with the Governor's Task Force on the Protection of Children. As part of this work, members testified at Governor's Task Force meetings, developed and participated in the Review of Family Assessment Effectiveness Committee, and learned more about the Winona County screening process. It was the only Citizen Review Panel in 2014 to respond to the provision of Medical Assistance until age 26 for former foster care youth by attempting to notify youth of this benefit.

Department Response

Department staff appreciates both the commitment and productive work of the Winona County Citizen Review Panel in 2014. The panel is unfailing in its support of the best efforts of the county's work regarding child protection, but also does not hesitate to ask questions about the process and adequacy of available resources. The panel is able to maintain both a big picture and detailed perspective in its service to children and families.

