

New DYFS chief meets with workers in A.C.

By PETE McALEER

Statehouse Bureau

February 28, 2004

TRENTON - In her 17 years as a caseworker, Deborah Simpson has seen plenty of failed attempts to fix the state's child-protection agency.

This latest try seems different.

"I think this time it's about the families and the children," Simpson said.

Simpson and her fellow employees at the Atlantic City office of the state's Division of Youth and Family Services, or DYFS, met their new boss Friday, Department of Human Services acting Commissioner James Davy. The workers offered reaction and advice on the state's \$125 million plan to resurrect DYFS with more staff, better pay for foster parents, improved screening procedures and increased funding for housing, job training and drug-treatment programs.

The morale and reputation of DYFS workers took a beating during the past year after highly publicized failures to protect foster children in Newark and Collingswood. Davy told the Atlantic City workers they were doing heroic, important work.

"You see things people shouldn't see," he said.

Simpson suggested caseworkers be allowed overtime to make evening follow-ups. Another worker suggested allowing college interns to receive training at DYFS during their senior year.

Workers seemed genuinely excited about the state's new plan for the agency. DYFS supervisor Michele O'Bannon said she was most pleased about the commitment to reduce worker caseloads.

"This appears to be more thought out than it was in the past," O'Bannon said.

Across town at Covenant House, a home for runaways, Davy met with teenagers who know all too well about the agency's years of poor planning.

Prince Munoz, 19, entered DYFS care at age 5. His mother had already got him started on drugs. Munoz spent the rest of his childhood bouncing around to 20 different foster homes. Some of the families abused him and kept the money given to them by the state for themselves. Munoz spent his time dealing drugs, stealing and "running away from the cops."

When he turned 18, Munoz aged out of DYFS and found himself on the street. Finding the Covenant House helped him turn his life around.

Today, Munoz is off drugs and working the midnight shift at the Atlantic City Hilton Casino Hotel, where he helps with slot promotions. Davy listened to Munoz's story and told him the state will expand its child-protection services so foster children can stay in the system until they turn 21.

"We're not going to cut kids loose at 18 anymore," Davy said.

The plan to fix the agency, titled "A New Beginning: The Future of Child Welfare in New Jersey," was announced earlier this month as part of the settlement of a 1999 lawsuit filed by Children's Rights Inc. of New York. The New Jersey Child Welfare Panel, established as part of the settlement, has until March 20 to approve the plan.

Another hurdle looms in July, when the state legislature must approve the \$150 million in funding. Assembly Budget

Chairman Lou Greenwald, D-Camden, has said he is hesitant to approve the plan unless he can be convinced it will produce results. Gov. James E. McGreevey has said he will veto the budget if the DYFS money is not included.

Davy asked workers Friday to help him sell the plan by calling the legislature and asking for their support. Atlantic City is the first stop in an eventual tour of the state's 32 district offices.

McGreevey's former chief of operations, Davy took over responsibility for DYFS earlier this year. He has been with the governor for more than a decade, serving as his administrator when McGreevey was mayor of Woodbridge Township. Since assuming the commissioner role, Davy has held weekly press conferences to update the media on progress at the agency.

In charge of the blueprint to fix DYFS is Lisa Eisenbud, who two years ago called attention to the agency's failures with a report that chronicled what happens to foster children when they turn 18. She said she decided to join McGreevey's staff because of his commitment to children.

"Now, I'm a child advocate on the inside," Eisenbud said. "It's a whole new day. It's not just some nibbling and trying to tinker around the edges."

At Covenant House, residential program director Brian Nelson would like to share the same optimism. But first he wants to see some results. Right now the state still needs more beds at transitional facilities like Covenant House, which often has to send children to its crisis center because of a lack of space. Most important is improved screening of foster parents, he said, so runaways don't continue to show up at his door with the same horror stories.

But Nelson said he believes Davy has some good ideas for improving the agency and his visit Friday was a positive sign. Asked to recall the last time the head of the DYFS visited the Covenant House, Nelson said "I don't think they ever have."

Overburdened DYFS workers say kids at risk

One Morris staffer is assigned 112 cases

BY SUSAN K. LIVIO Star-Ledger Staff February 28, 2004

With abused and neglected children flooding into the Division of Youth and Family Services at a record rate, caseworkers are warning the state they are so swamped they can no longer vouch for the safety of children they are supposed to protect.

Six caseworkers in the Morris office filed grievances this past week saying caseloads had skyrocketed to the point that one worker is assigned to supervise 112 cases; another had 97. Only two of the workers have caseloads anywhere near the statewide average of 42 cases. "Workers who are getting case after case are so stressed out, they are losing it. Anywhere from 15 to 20 people have quit or transferred out over the last six months," said Guy Gordon, caseworker and shop steward for Communications Workers of America Local 1037.

The union says six more Morris staffers are expected to file grievances on Monday, following the lead of the Bergen County district office, which has filed at least 40 grievances for excessive workloads since December, litigation supervisor Jackie Friedman-Collins said yesterday.

"People are crying because they can't do the work," Friedman-Collins said. "There are eight people with caseloads over 100 kids, 11 others have more than 70."

The complaints come as the state's child welfare agency is planning an unprecedented overhaul at DYFS that includes

hiring 1,500 additional workers and setting caseload limits over the next 2 1/2 years. But union officials say they need help now.

Acting Human Services Commissioner James Davy yesterday acknowledged the lack of staffing is a statewide problem, particularly as the number of children under the state's supervision has climbed to a record high of 66,000.

"It's a problem everywhere," Davy said. "That's why we need to get the plan implemented so we get the resources we need."

The total number of children monitored by DYFS has climbed 40 percent since January 2003, when police recovered the beaten body of 7-year-old Faheem Williams from a relative's closet in Newark. The boy's death raised public awareness of child abuse and sparked outrage against the state because DYFS had closed the family's case without investigating an allegation of abuse.

No one is quite sure why the caseloads have been rising so fast, but there are theories. One is that public scrutiny and publicity during the past 13 months has prompted people to report more cases of suspected abuse. Another theory is that cases aren't getting closed as quickly anymore out of fear workers may miss something, as they did with Faheem's case.

DYFS employees in Morris County alluded to Faheem's death in a letter Thursday to Gov. James E. McGreevey, asking for his help.

"It has been a year since we were promised changes to prevent more tragedies," the letter said. "We on the front line see little improvement and have seen our caseloads continue to climb. The lives of the children we are committed to protecting are too valuable to wait months while the latest plan is implemented."

Davy said workers in Morris will get some relief next week when two employees finish training and join the 12 others who accept new cases.

Another 14 trainees -- people with less than a year on the job -- will take a small number of low-risk ongoing cases to help lighten the load. And an additional specialist will be added to help close cases that no longer need DYFS supervision.

Gordon said these interim steps are not adequate because few of the new employees are experienced enough to do field investigations of serious allegations of abuse. Gordon says he has received 14 new cases to investigate in just more than two weeks. Meanwhile he hasn't seen some children in months.

"We have so many chiefs overlooking everything right now -- they should take some of the people in the regional offices and give them a caseload," Gordon said.

The problems are not confined to Bergen and Morris county, said Hetty Rosenstein, president of CWA Local 1037. "Every office is in crisis. There's plenty of offices that are just as bad as Morris."

In the long-term, the state's reform plan addresses the problem.

The written plan contains a section on revising the way workers investigate allegations of abuse and get assigned cases. The plan envisions that employees who investigate complaints would do nothing else, and would get no more than eight new cases a month. Caseload-carrying workers would get no more than 15 cases a month.

Marcia Robinson Lowry, executive director of Children's Rights Inc., which sued the state for violating foster children's rights, said she was alarmed by the skyrocketing caseloads.

"We understand it will take a long time to get the agency functioning, but money was supposed to come in the short-term to deal with the crisis of high caseloads," Lowry said. "Children's lives may well be at stake."

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DYFS reviewing its actions before boy's scalding death

Mother who left her 4 kids alone overnight was investigated twice last year

BY SUSAN K. LIVIO Star-Ledger Staff March 03, 2004

The scalding death of a 5-year-old autistic boy left alone with his three siblings all night in their Trenton apartment is raising questions, once again, about the actions and decision-making of the state's child protection system.

Acting Human Services Commissioner James Davy asked Edward Cotton, director of the Division of Youth and Family Services, to review the case history of Alicia Day, a 30-year-old mother of four whose son, Samuel Allen III, died a week ago.

The Mercer County Prosecutor's Office believes the boy was using the bathroom sink and was unable to shut off the hot water, which fatally scalded him.

The prosecutor has charged the boy's mother with child endangerment for leaving her children unsupervised while she worked an overnight shift. Day is being held at the Trenton Psychiatric Hospital, where she is undergoing a psychiatric evaluation, said Casey DeBlasio, the prosecutor's spokeswoman.

According to state officials, Day came to work last Tuesday night after losing her baby sitter at the last minute because her boss threatened to fire her.

Twice last year, DYFS employees investigated Day -- once in October when someone reported Samuel was running naked in the development where the family lived and again in December after her oldest son told teachers he was afraid his mother would beat him because he got suspended from school. DYFS spokesman Andy Williams said the agency did not substantiate either complaint.

"I am looking to see whether a thorough investigation was done," Cotton said. The examination into the October complaint was handled "quickly and competently," but he is still reviewing the December incident.

"The commissioner is asking if anything was offered to the mother," Williams said. "Was there child care or any support services offered? Did we pursue everything we could have to help out the family?"

DYFS records give no indication that caseworkers made monthly visits in November or January, state officials said. Monthly visits are typical in most cases when DYFS is monitoring a family.

The Day case comes after a year of unrelenting scandals that showed DYFS unable to ensure the safety of children under its watch.

Gov. James E. McGreevey is trying to launch a complete overhaul of DYFS to settle a federal class-action lawsuit a child advocacy organization brought on behalf of foster children.

Elements of that reform plan -- which were the subject of a public hearing in Newark yesterday and another in Camden today -- could have been helpful in identifying Day's needs and tightening up investigation procedures, Cotton said.

"The mother did not raise the issue of a child care problem," Cotton said. But under proposed policy changes contained in the reform plan, DYFS workers would be trained to be much more "prescriptive" -- offering to link parents to services like child care, or steering them toward programs enabling them to go back to school or find a job, Cotton said.

State officials envision DYFS forging more networks of local social service agencies that can assist families who need counseling and support.

"Families are, for better or worse, more likely to accept services from a community group" than DYFS, Cotton said.

The reform plan also calls for the abolishment of the term "unsubstantiated" when deciding whether a claim of abuse or neglect has occurred.

DYFS investigators will have to affirmatively state the claim is "unfounded" or "substantiated," instead of "unsubstantiated," which typically means there is a lack of evidence to support the claim but a worker still has some unresolved concerns.

Both allegations against Day were "unsubstantiated."

Implementing these changes -- provided they meet the approval of a court-ordered panel of experts -- will take some time to retrain workers, Davy said. "Just because we have a plan doesn't mean we are ready to go."

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Boy's Death Called New Sign of Lapses in Child Welfare System

By RICHARD LEZIN JONES and RONALD SMOTHERS NY Times March 4, 2004

NEWARK, March 3 - State investigators said on Wednesday that the death of a 5-year-old autistic boy who was fatally scalded while he was left unsupervised last week demonstrates more serious lapses in New Jersey's troubled child welfare system.

The authorities have arrested the boy's mother, Alicia Day, 30. She had been the subject of unsubstantiated abuse and neglect investigations by the state's Division of Youth and Family Services twice in the past six months and was in line to be monitored by the agency, officials said.

In a preliminary investigation of the handling of Ms. Day's case by child welfare officials, Kevin M. Ryan, the state's independent child advocate, called those efforts "shallow" and said the case raised alarming management issues for the agency.

Ms. Day's son, Samuel Allen, died on Feb. 25 when, the authorities said, Ms. Day went to work on an overnight shift at her job and left her five children - none older than 11 - in their home, in Trenton, unattended. The authorities said that Samuel died when he was unable to shut off a hot water valve after using the bathroom during the night.

The Mercer County prosecutor, Joseph L. Bocchini Jr., said that his office was weighing charges against Ms. Day.

The State Human Services commissioner, James M. Davy, whose department oversees the child welfare agency, ordered a review of the agency's handling of the case.

"The commissioner had questions about everything that was done for the family," said Andy Williams, a spokesman for the agency.

Mr. Ryan, the state's child advocate, said on Wednesday that his review, which is continuing, found no evidence that the agency offered child care or other support services to Ms. Day's family and that workers did not adequately assess potential risks to the children in her home.

"In this way, the investigations were shallow," said Mr. Ryan, who added, "This is textbook case of a family in need who was not being served."

The advocate also noted that just four days before Samuel's death, a supervisor at the agency noticed that Ms. Day's file was being considered for closing, but recommended that field workers re-establish contact with the family.

"There was a notation that this case will not be closed until you do this and this," Mr. Ryan said. "This is the first time I've seen that kind of statement in a case file in a long time."

That sentiment, Mr. Ryan said, may demonstrate that despite its continuing failings, the child welfare agency is regarding itself and its cases with a more exacting eye after a year in which state officials, including Gov. James E. McGreevey, conceded that the system was perilously flawed.

Last month, as part of the settlement of a federal lawsuit against the state's foster care system, the agency unveiled a nearly 200-page plan to overhaul the system. The plan, expected to cost about \$125 million in the next fiscal year, calls for hiring about 1,000 child welfare workers and creating teams of specially trained investigators who would handle allegations of abuse and neglect.

The proposal also calls for broadening the agency's support for families, including offering greater child care and baby-sitting for families who need it.

Mr. Ryan said that the kind of proposals suggested in the agency's overhaul might help prevent the deaths of children who are harmed when they are left unsupervised, as the authorities believe Samuel had been.

The agency opened an investigation into Ms. Day's family in October, when workers received a report that a naked Samuel was playing in the neighborhood. Two months later, the agency visited Ms. Day's home again when teachers reported that Ms. Day's eldest child had told them that he would be beaten if school officials called home to report that he had misbehaved in school.

Both reports were marked "unsubstantiated" in the agency's files.

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DYFS contests claim of mishandled case

BY SUSAN K. LIVIO Star-Ledger Staff March 05, 2004

Top Human Services officials yesterday disputed the state Child Advocate's conclusions that child welfare workers mishandled a case last year when they investigated a mother now charged in the death of her son.

Acting Human Services Commissioner James Davy said state workers had repeatedly asked a Trenton mother of four whether she wanted outside help taking care of her family. Workers also verified that she had child care by speaking to her baby-sitters.

The Mercer County Prosecutor's Office charged Alicia Day, 30, with four counts of child endangerment for leaving her

children alone when she went to work the overnight shift at a manufacturing plant Feb. 24. During the night, her 5-year-old autistic son, Samuel Allen III, was scalded to death by water from a bathroom faucet that he could not shut off.

State Child Advocate Kevin Ryan on Wednesday said the death might have been prevented if DYFS had better handled two investigations involving the mother last year.

DYFS investigated Day in October when someone reported Samuel was running naked in the neighborhood. DYFS was back in December after Day's 9-year-old son told teachers he was afraid his mother would beat him because he got suspended.

The agency did not substantiate either complaint. But DYFS staff did ask the mother if she needed any help, Davy said.

"The caseworker said because autistic children can be difficult to handle, an offer of support services was extended to the mother but she declined," Davy said. "This worker was also aware that Ms. Day worked, but she assured the worker she had a baby-sitter and a backup lined up for her. The caseworker contacted and spoke to both baby-sitters, verifying they watched the kids."

Davy's comments contradict Ryan's statement Wednesday that DYFS employees had failed to interview anyone other than the mother and her children. Davy and DYFS Director Edward Cotton contend the file also contained notes from an interview with the older boy's teacher following the allegation in December.

A spokeswoman for Ryan's office, which monitors DYFS and other agencies that serve children, said in a brief statement that he stands by his office's findings.

"We have again reviewed the case record. Our concerns remain," said Kathleen Crenshaw, spokeswoman for the Office of the Child Advocate. "We look forward to discussing this with the commissioner directly."

Davy and Cotton did acknowledge some shortcomings with the case. DYFS staff recommended the family's case be closed without making the required visit to ensure that the family no longer needed monitoring -- a point caught by a high-level DYFS manager reviewing the file because it was tagged for closure.

DYFS managers are getting overtime pay to finish paperwork on 6,000 cases and close them out, and the family's case was one of them, Cotton said.

The notes in the file were "vague" about the worker's discussion with the baby-sitters, said Cotton, who said he was still investigating to independently verify what happened.

Workers also failed to document in the family's file that they had offered to refer the woman to social services programs in the community after investigating her in December, Davy said.

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Foster parents balk at DYFS reforms

Speaking at two hearings, they say some proposals are unworkable but support others

BY SUSAN K. LIVIO Star-Ledger Staff March 04, 2004

The state's court-ordered plan to reform New Jersey's child welfare system is drawing criticism from some foster parents who say it may make their job tougher.

Some child advocates attending a public hearing in Camden yesterday praised the comprehensive approach of the 188-

page proposal, which would spend \$320 million over the next 2 1/2 years to improve the state's system of protecting abused and neglected children. But others said the plan still falls short in the effort to change a system state officials admit has been underfunded, understaffed and mismanaged for decades.

The plan to revamp the Division of Youth and Family Services was crafted as part of the settlement of a class-action suit claiming the state does not adequately protect foster children. The New Jersey Child Welfare Panel, created by the settlement, must decide by March 18 whether the plan is ambitious enough.

Foster care is one of the key areas acting Human Services Commissioner James Davy wants to change. The plan calls for foster parents to be paid more to care for children and be assigned their own caseworker to help them through the training process and with potential problems once children are placed in their homes.

While foster parents said they support these moves, some said they were alarmed by a plan to try to keep foster children in their own neighborhoods -- even if they are not safe places to live. Others said a proposal for biological parents and foster parents to work collaboratively and hold regular meetings is unrealistic.

"I don't want to be a gatekeeper for the parents," said foster parent Julie Smith of Haddonfield, who added that the plan sounds like foster parents would be asked to teach biological parents "how to be parents, which is a job in and of itself."

Smith, 41, an attorney, and Joan Taylor, 41, an investment banker, are foster parents to four children. They were one of two Camden County foster families who received a personal visit from Davy prior to yesterday's hearing.

Taylor and Smith described the current bureaucracy as a "nightmare," but they said they are grateful to the state for the opportunity to care for the four children, all of whom they hope to adopt someday.

"Every one of the kids that has come into our house is the perfect, ideal child," said Taylor.

Some foster parents defended the plan to force a collaboration between foster and biological parents. At the Camden hearing, Mays Landing foster parent Nadia Cayce called the proposal "a cultural shift" that is "in the best interests of the child."

"People will finally ask the biological parents and the foster parents: What do you think is best?" she said.

At Tuesday's hearing in Newark, foster parents said the state proposal to keep children in their neighborhoods could do more harm than good.

"You assume placing these children close to home is what's good for these children. What about the child who is being hunted by the gang he just got out of, or the child who is under pressure to use or distribute drugs?" said Carmen Pinto, president of the foster and adoption families' group in Essex County.

In Haddonfield yesterday, foster parent Taylor said she was concerned about the state's plan to earmark \$1 million for home repairs to help foster parents pass inspection.

"This encourages foster parents to do it for the money," said Taylor, who suggested the state "take that \$1 million dollars and hire more judges" to move adoptions more quickly.

Davy said he was surprised at foster parents' criticism.

"I thought we were responding to their needs, but maybe that wasn't clear in the plan," he said. "We need to be more clear."

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DYFS overhaul plan praised and critiqued

More than 40 people testified before the panel charged with approving the blueprint for the troubled child-welfare system.

By Mitch Lipka and Troy Graham Inquirer Staff Mar. 04, 2004

CAMDEN - Some came as cheerleaders. Others came to protect their turf.

Of the more than 40 people who testified yesterday before a panel of experts deciding the fate of New Jersey's blueprint to overhaul its broken child welfare system, just about every one of them wanted to see the state succeed.

"All 63,000 children under the supervision of DYFS [the Division of Youth and Family Services] are waiting for us to help them," Jessica Kuhn of Haddon Heights told members of the New Jersey Child Welfare Panel. "They cannot wait any longer."

The panel, created by the settlement of a lawsuit filed against the state by the advocacy group Children's Rights Inc., has until March 19 to determine whether the state's 200-page overhaul plan should be adopted. Until then, the panel can ask the state for revisions.

In the unlikely event the panel rejects the state's plan, it would be up to a federal judge to impose terms set out by Children's Rights. That puts considerable pressure on the state to satisfy the panel.

Panel chairman Steven Cohen of the Annie E. Casey Foundation said it was likely that there would be some negotiation between the panel and state officials before the deadline. The state would then be given a month or so to incorporate changes agreed to by the panel.

Panel members also heard from about 40 people Tuesday in Newark, N.J., and are fielding additional e-mails and phone calls. Yesterday's hearing was inside the United Way headquarters in Camden.

"We've heard some things that have upped the decibel level of things we already knew about," said panel member Judith Meltzer, deputy director of Center for the Study of Social Policy.

Meltzer and Cohen said they would be looking for the state to provide more clarity and detail, and to place a higher priority on certain parts of the plan. They would not discuss their overall impression of the plan.

"This is a very broad and ambitious plan," Cohen said. "It has a lot of good things in it."

Some DYFS workers and foster parents who attended the four-hour hearing praised the plan, but raised specific objections and questioned the feasibility of some reform ideas.

Elizabeth Hickey, a foster parent who has adopted five children, worried about a provision to find most children homes close to their old neighborhoods. The Medford woman said just one child from her town had to be placed in foster care last year.

"I would totally be put out of fostering," she said. "I would hate to see the plan put me and a lot of other great foster-parents out of the realm to help these kids."

Two DYFS workers wondered whether key provisions - to keep children close to their homes and ask foster parents to work with birth parents - would be possible.

"Many times it's the [birth] parents who sabotage a placement," caseworker Maureen Schultz said. "That's not to say there aren't some current foster parents who work with birth parents, but it's their choice, not a requirement."

She said that placing children close to troubled birth families could create "some messy situations."

Jerome Jackson, another caseworker, also questioned a plan to enlist birth families and their communities in deciding the best way to care for a foster child.

"Most families do not sit down together to have a meal, let alone sit down to determine a course of action for their children," he said.

Before the hearing, Department of Human Services Acting Commissioner James Davy visited a foster home in Haddonfield, where he heard an earful about the plan from two mostly content foster parents.

Lawyer Julie Smith and investment banker Joan Taylor, both 41, have an infant and three toddlers in their five-bedroom home. They took issue with some aspects of the plan they said created financial incentives for people to become foster parents.

One part of the plan calls for the state to fund repairs to homes to make them suitable for foster children.

Smith told Davy it wouldn't be safe for the children nor fair to the foster parents to put them so close to their former homes as to allow encounters with potentially enraged birth-parents.

They also urged Davy to do what he could to streamline the court process, which they said is fragmented and filled with delays.

"It goes on and on and on," Smith said.

Overall, the couple said they loved being foster parents.

"These kids that are in foster care are great kids," Taylor said. "They're children. They deserve to be treated like human beings."

Davy, who said he was there to listen, praised their involvement.

"You're doing God's work here," he told them.

Despite a raft of bad publicity from botched cases, both women said their experience with DYFS workers had been mostly good.

At the hearing, Carla Katz, president of Communications Workers of America Local 1034, which represents some DYFS employees, urged the panel to not make it easier to fire workers as part of repairing the system.

"It's a hard place to work," she said. "We're continuously losing workers. We need a retention plan, not another exit plan."

Katz said the union was pleased with the state's plan to increase workers and cap caseloads.

"We're impressed with the plan's vision and breadth," she said.

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DHS PRESS RELEASE: January 9, 2004

State awards contract for DYFS computer system

TRENTON— The New Jersey Department of Human Services (DHS) announced today it has selected a vendor to implement a new child welfare information system to help caseworkers track and monitor children and families.

The contract for the Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System (SACWIS) to be used by the Division of Youth and Family Services (DYFS) has been awarded to American Management Systems, Inc. (AMS) headquartered in Fairfax, Virginia. The \$26.8 million contract is subject to review and approval by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Children and Families.

“Thanks to Governor McGreevey, we are finally on the road to providing our staff with the technology they need to do their jobs effectively,” said DHS Commissioner Gwendolyn L. Harris. “SACWIS is long overdue. Past administrations did not, for whatever reason, see fit to update our child welfare information system. We’re still using the same computer system I used 20 years ago as a DYFS district office manager.”

SACWIS will reduce manual paperwork and repetitive data entry allowing workers to spend more time in the field protecting children. SACWIS' enhanced functionality will benefit DYFS workers and community providers as they will now be able to provide more timely services to children and families.

New Jersey is one of only six states yet to implement SACWIS. DYFS currently relies upon a combination of six mainframe, 17 PC based and five Oracle-based systems to support child welfare operations. Current systems are incapable of producing necessary prompts/alerts of casework activities and fail to provide supervisors with the necessary management tools to track case practice issues.

In addition, the current systems cannot talk to each other or share information. SACWIS will integrate the data and functionality of these systems into one integrated application providing a seamless source of information to the Division and its workers.

The new system will also incorporate specific prompts/alerts for caseworkers to visit families or conference a case with supervisors within designated timeframes. This will allow caseworkers, supervisors and senior management to proactively manage individual cases and the overall caseload.

“SACWIS will improve our system of checks and balances,” said Commissioner Harris. “How many children have been placed at risk because staff didn’t have accurate information or couldn’t access it at all?”

As part of the reform plan to improve the State’s child welfare system, more than 2600 new computers have already been supplied as part of the SACWIS development. Using the latest web-based technology, SACWIS will produce an integrated system that will:

- ## Support quality assurance, outcome monitoring and evaluation through improved tracking of cases, including required reviews and assessments to ensure that all cases are properly accounted for and served as promptly and effectively as possible

- ## Expand automated management reports to facilitate timely policy decision-making, program evaluation, quality assurance, accounting, research and other administrative functions

- ## Support the automation of DYFS’ Structured Decision Making (SDM) process that will improve consistency and accuracy in the decisions staff makes. SDM is a decision-making model that sets specific criteria for determining immediate and long-term risk to a child and facilitates case planning

- ## Brings the state in compliance with Federal regulations such as the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) and the Child and Family Service Review (CFSR) that require an automated child welfare system

Provide appropriate interfaces with other information systems to coordinate information and communication with the courts, Work First New Jersey (TANF), Medicaid, and child support enforcement

Enhance DYFS' ability to meet Federal AFCARS (Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System) and NCANDS (National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System) reporting requirements - translating into increased Federal reimbursements including Title IV-E (foster care)

Enhance the capacity of DYFS to allocate and monitor the expenditure of funds for third party contracted social services from private providers to support its child protection/child welfare efforts.

To alleviate problems and to expedite implementation, New Jersey's SACWIS system will be based upon the successful system AMS developed for Wisconsin. Called eWiSACWIS, Wisconsin's system supports nearly 3,000 caseworkers with about 800 concurrent users daily. The system being transferred also has the potential to provide mobile and remote functionality to workers and providers, allowing the system to be used in the field and eventually by community groups and service providers.

In addition to Wisconsin, AMS has developed SACWIS systems for Alaska, Connecticut, Illinois, New Mexico and Rhode Island. The company has also led SACWIS design projects in Alabama and Louisiana.

Seven vendors originally supplied bids which were subsequently reviewed for compliance by the Department of Treasury's Division of Purchase and Property. Bidders were required to meet New Jersey procurement regulations and were subjected to extensive review including reference checks, on-site visits and program demonstrations.

Installed through a series of modules, the system will be operational within 24 months with the first module rolling out statewide within the first year. Recognizing the importance of providing staff with the tools they need to serve New Jersey's children and families, the Division recently deployed several interim applications to help track visits with children as well as foster care placements which can lead to better documentation and additional Federal reimbursement for Title-IV E (foster care).

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State probes parents' treatment of foster children

Pair says locked doors, nailed-shut windows aren't signs of abuse

BY SUSAN K. LIVIO AND MARY JO PATTERSON Star-Ledger Staff March 06, 2004

A South Jersey family who adopted at least eight foster children is under scrutiny after a child welfare worker found several children locked inside their home. Many of the house's windows also were nailed shut.

Egg Harbor Township police, who were called to the scene, broke a kitchen window in order to enter the house of Irene and Karey Smalley, said police Lt. Blaze Catania. Inside were two adopted sons, ages 12 and 16, another child, 3, and an adult sibling.

The Smalleys have numerous grown biological children, as well as the children they adopted through the state Division of Youth and Family Services.

DYFS subsequently removed the 12- and 16-year-olds out of concern for their safety, said Laurie Facciarossa, spokeswoman for the state Department of Human Services. A Superior Court judge, meanwhile, allowed seven other children to remain in the home, she said. Facciarossa did not name the Smalleys as the family under scrutiny.

Because the family has been under supervision for nearly a year, acting Human Services Commissioner James Davy

"has ordered a complete review and investigation into the state's involvement with the family," she said.

In an interview at their home yesterday, the parents denied mistreating any of their children.

The chain of events began Monday when a DYFS worker tried to make an unannounced visit. The agency was monitoring the family because, in May 2003, one of the Smalleys' daughters alleged that two younger brothers were being abused, according to sources who saw the family's file.

The teenager alleged that the boys -- the same boys who were found locked in on Monday -- were being locked in their bedrooms and denied use of a bathroom as well as adequate food, the sources said.

Yesterday, the Smalleys said they had not neglected or abused any of their kids. They described themselves as very religious and dedicated parents.

In an interview, Irene Smalley said she went shopping and forgot to leave her sons a key with which to open the deadbolt lock. The windows on the front and side of the house were nailed shut for security reasons, she said.

Irene Smalley said that one of the refrigerators in the house had a padlock, but displayed another that was unlocked and stocked with food. The padlocked refrigerator stored her husband's diabetes medicine, she said.

Her two sons were home on Monday because they are home-schooled, she said. The other children attend regular school, she said.

If anyone is guilty of neglect, it is DYFS, Irene Smalley said. The mother said she pleaded with DYFS in September to give her additional help with her 16-year-old, who is defiant and difficult, or put him in foster care. No one helped, she said.

"I'm not guilty of what they say they're going to charge me with," she said. "Before they starve, I'll starve. That's the way it is."

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Don't shortchange DYFS Star-Ledger Editorial March 08, 2004

The price tag for reforming the state Division of Youth and Family Services is a big one: \$320 million over the next 2 1/2 years, \$125 million from the budget the Legislature is working on now.

The children who died or suffered abuse under DYFS's care paid dearly to drag New Jersey toward this reform. Now the Legislature must find a way to fund every cent required to execute it, in their name.

The \$320 million price tag is, in fact, the cost of having left too many things undone for too long. Start with the computerized tracking system DYFS is building to help caseworkers easily identify what has been accomplished and remains to be done for each family. Some kids might not have slipped through the cracks had the system been operational. It should have been up and running long ago.

But the Legislature kept freezing the funds as 3,200 desktop computers became obsolete waiting for completion of the system. That kind of waste cannot be tolerated this time.

The reform plan calls for \$58 million to expand drug treatment. That will help DYFS because a high percentage of its cases involve addicted parents. But drug abuse is also clogging our prisons and courts. For every person in treatment, three more are on a waiting list for state-subsidized rehab.

The drug treatment funds, money to provide shelter for victims of domestic abuse and many other items in the DYFS request mean the state will be able to help DYFS families without making others wait for the help they need.

Expanding the foster care system and hiring new DYFS staff will cost money now and into the future.

Adding caseworkers, computers and foster families will help, but the sheer numbers are not enough. For this reform to succeed, the Legislature must also provide money to train and reorganize the staff and construct safeguards against the fumbling that is now synonymous with DYFS.

The Legislature must insist that reformers justify every penny they spend. And the Legislature must keep a sharp eye on the progress of this reform.

What the lawmakers cannot do is get cheap and give reformers a built-in excuse for failure. That will not be tolerated. Payment is due -- now.

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RELEASE: March 4, 2004

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DYFS on Track to Safely Close 6,000 Cases but New Cases Add to High Caseload

Ahead of its pace to safely close 6,000 cases, the Division of Youth and Family Services safely closed 1,459 cases last week for a total of 5,647 cases over the past six weeks but thousands of new cases continue to burden staff, Acting Human Services Commissioner James Davy announced today.

During his weekly press briefing Davy continued to express concerns about the high caseload of 66,000 children. Though the Division has closed a significant number of cases involving children who appeared safe and no longer in need of supervision, more than 5,900 new cases have been opened in the past several weeks.

“So far, we have managed to stabilize our caseload,” Davy said. “We’ve made some progress but the new cases continue to put quite a burden on our caseworkers across the state. We may not see true relief until DYFS establishes centralized screening to control intake and adds new workers to help shoulder the caseload.”

Davy has directed his staff to begin planning additional hires in the current year to ease the rising caseloads carried by individual workers. Caseworkers in DYFS district offices supervise an average of 42 children, but many veteran workers carry higher caseloads because workers with less than a year experience have limited numbers of cases.

Closing the 6,000 backlogged cases was one of seven immediate actions ordered by Davy on January 14. Acting Commissioner Davy gave the following progress report on those actions:

- Expedite the Licensing Process and Add 100 New Foster Family and Treatment Homes

Status: The Department has licensed 183 new homes this year. In addition, about 240 potential foster homes are involved in a “parallel track” licensing system, undergoing home studies while the prospective foster parents are still in training.

- Increase transportation and child care services to ensure that foster children do not spend their days in DYFS district offices.

Status: Last week, seven children spent significant amounts of time in DYFS district offices. This represented a slight increase from the week before, when DYFS recorded an average of one child per day. In January, the division typically

saw two to four children each day spending significant time in district offices.

- End the practice of allowing newborns to remain in hospitals after they are medically cleared to leave.

Status: Of 21 “boarder babies” in New Jersey hospitals on Jan. 14, one remains in a hospital. The child has severe medical problems and is awaiting placement in a pediatric group home. All told, there are 15 boarder babies statewide as of today. Two veteran DYFS workers continue working in the Newark area – which has about 75 percent of the state’s boarder baby cases – to target this problem. Last week, three family team conferences were held in Newark to discuss active boarder baby cases. In two cases, relatives were identified to provide a home for the child. Background checks and home studies are underway. A total of seven boarder babies were discharged from hospitals last week, and four were placed with relatives.

- Redo safety assessments of 6,000 children in out-of-home placement.

Status: To date, 1,589 DYFS workers and 697 community agency staff members were trained in the new assessment protocol. One additional training session has been scheduled. DYFS workers and their community agency counterparts have held 189 pre-assessment conferences and completed 45 assessments through the end of last week. No safety concerns were noted.

Davy also announced an additional 500 safety assessments will be re-done. The Child Advocate raised issue with these assessments as part of his Collingswood report several weeks ago. These assessments were originally done when the worker was completing the required monthly placement visit as part of the adoption process. The assessments should have been done as a separate visit said Davy.

- Bolster foster parent recruitment and retention.

Status: The Hispanic Information Center – which has a contract to develop 10 foster-care beds for Hispanic children – has identified five potential foster homes in Hudson County and one in Passaic County. In addition, DHS officials continue working with the child welfare panel to develop a \$1.5 million initiative to recruit resource homes in targeted communities. Davy said he expects the final plan will be finished in the next few weeks.

- Expedite medical examinations of children going to foster homes and other placements.

Status: DYFS continues interviewing applicants to fill 12 positions for nurses who will handle medical screenings for children moving from one foster placement to another. In addition, pediatricians are available in all 21 counties to examine children going into foster care and other out-of-home placements. To date, 19 DYFS offices – out of 38 field offices in the state – have allocated private space to conduct medical exams. The remaining offices are still working to identify appropriate space.

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RELEASE: March 8, 2004

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Human Services announces initiative to expedite behavioral health services for children in detention

TRENTON – The Department of Human Services (DHS) announced today it will assign two youth case managers to the Camden County Youth Center (CCYC) and free up an additional \$600,000 to add five treatment homes in South Jersey over the next few weeks so children can move more quickly out of the overcrowded detention facility and into more appropriate settings where they can get the behavioral health services they need.

Under the direction of Acting Commissioner Jim Davy, senior DHS staff worked throughout the weekend developing a

strategy to address the continuing overcrowding problems and difficult situation facing CCYC and the children it serves.

“This is an important first step in reducing the number of children in inappropriate institutional settings,” said Division of Child Behavioral Health Services (DCBHS) Director Kathi Way. “Many of these children languish in facilities like CCYC because it takes too long to conduct an assessment and connect children to the services they need.”

Per the urging of the Camden County Board of Freeholders and CCYC Administrator and State Assemblywoman Mary T. Previte, DHS acknowledged it needed to take immediate action to relieve the situation. Earlier today, Way and Ed Cotton, director of the Division of Youth and Family Services (DYFS), met with Previte to tour the facility and explain the new initiative.

The youth case manager will be located on-site at CCYC to conduct interviews and assessments with the children so they may be connected to necessary services. In the past, the children would have to wait several weeks for this to occur at an off-site mental health facility. By placing staff directly at the detention facility, DHS hopes to expedite the process of creating a personalized treatment plan including placing the child in a more appropriate out-of-home setting such as a community-based treatment home or residential treatment center.

In addition, DHS announced it will also free up \$600,000 to add five treatment homes over the next few weeks for children throughout South Jersey. Originally, DHS planned to add 75 treatment homes and 45 emergency treatment homes statewide by June 2005. Due to problems facing CCYC and detention centers throughout the state, the Department recognized it could not wait. Further details about the additional treatment homes will be announced shortly when service contracts are finalized.

“One of the goals of the child welfare reform plan is to stop placing children with behavioral health issues in settings such as detention centers,” explained Way. “They belong in a therapeutic environment where they can get the services and support they deserve.”

As part of the child welfare reform plan, DHS plans to take several actions to reduce the number of children residing inappropriately in institutional settings including:

- Conduct family team meetings with family and community agencies to develop an appropriate treatment strategy for the child
- Over the next year move 150 children in residential treatment centers, group homes, shelters and detention centers into more appropriate community based settings or their own home with proper support services
- Over the next two years, return 80 percent of the children in out-of-state placements back home to New Jersey where family and friends can more easily provide support
- Expand the overall capacity of in-home community based services and supports statewide.

According to Way, DCBHS also recently expanded mobile response services to Camden County on February 9th. Through this invaluable service, trained staff respond immediately to families and congregate care facilities like detention centers to assist children with an escalating behavioral issue immediately. This allows the child to be stabilized and remain in their current living arrangement.

Since its implementation last month, mobile response has assisted four youth currently residing at CCYC.

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DYFS gets high praise in Delimar transition

By CAROL COMEGNO Courier-Post Staff

March 13, 2004

MOUNT LAUREL

At first the little girl didn't completely understand.

A state Division of Youth and Family Services therapist had told 6-year-old Delimar Vera of Willingboro the story of a mommy and daddy who thought they lost their baby in a fire.

After hearing the tale last week, Delimar romped around the DYFS office and finally jumped into the lap of DYFS supervisor Karen Stoever of Berlin Borough.

"She told me they (the mother and father) lost their baby in the fire. Then I told her she was the baby," said Stoever, saying Delimar finally began to understand.

"We loved, hugged and kissed her day by day. She needed nurturing and we provided it," Stoever said of the worker giving attention to Delimar, who was allegedly kidnapped from a Philadelphia home that was apparently set on fire in 1997.

Stoever and three other employees worked on the case to place the kindergartner in a foster family two weeks ago and then helped reunite her last week with her biological parents from Philadelphia.

Those employees gave an exclusive interview to the Courier-Post Thursday in the presence of their boss, James Davy, acting commissioner of the New Jersey Department of Human Services.

He came to their DYFS office on Howard Avenue in Mount Laurel to praise them for their work in making the girl's transition so smooth. They in turn thanked him for coming to tell them. **ADVERTISEMENT - CLICK TO ENLARGE OR VISIT WEBSITE**

"What you did in the Delimar Vera case was so special. It was caring, compassionate and quality work," Davy said.

"We shouldn't be painted with a broad brush when bad things happen because we're doing God's work in the vineyard every day," he said, alluding to adverse publicity on some other cases.

In Delimar's case, Stoever praised her separated parents, Luz Cuevas and Pedro Vera, for acting responsibly and complying with all of DYFS' wishes. "They didn't want to do anything to hurt her," she said.

DYFS workers praised in case of 6-year-old once believed dead March 13, 2004

MOUNT LAUREL, N.J. -- The state's acting Human Services Commissioner praised child welfare caseworkers for their efforts in the case of a girl who was reunited with her biological parents six years after authorities believed she died in a fire.

James Davy told workers last week that they did "caring, compassionate and quality work" in taking care of the child until she was returned to her birth parents.

Police allege that the girl _ named Delimar Vera at birth _ was kidnapped from her crib in Philadelphia when she was 10 days old. The woman who was raising the 6-year-old girl now faces kidnapping and arson charges.

The Division of Youth and Family Services placed the girl with a foster family two weeks ago and then helped reunite her last week with her biological parents in Philadelphia.

The agency has been criticized following a series of high-profile cases, including the discovery last October of four boys allegedly starved by their adoptive parents in Collingswood.

"We shouldn't be painted with a broad brush when bad things happen because we're doing God's work in the vineyard every day," Davy told workers, according to the Courier-Post of Cherry Hill.

DYFS' Mount Laurel office manager Francine Scott said all cases should receive as much individual attention, but she noted the agency is overburdened.

"It was the epitome of how we'd like every case to proceed in placing a child," she said.

Police allege that Carolyn Correa, 42, of Willingboro snatched the child in December 1997 and then torched the house to cover her crime and raised the infant as her own.

Correa, a cousin by marriage of the girl's father, Pedro Vera, was charged with arson, kidnapping and 13 other counts. She has been held on \$1 million bail since her arrest March 2.

Cuevas said she instantly recognized the little girl as her daughter at a Jan. 24 birthday party given by a sister of Delimar's father. DNA tests established that Cuevas and Vera were the girl's biological parents and that Correa was not her birth mother, police said.

Chief caseworker Chas Keith said the agency was able to get things in order despite all the attention that the girl's story drew.

"You have a good feeling that you did the right thing for this little girl to help preserve her future," Keith told the Courier-Post.

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Child abuse and neglect

The Associated Press 3/5/2004

(AP) — Facts on child abuse:

_About 900,000 U.S. children are found to be victims of maltreatment each year.

_The National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System reported 1,300 child fatalities as a result of abuse or neglect in 2001.

_Some researchers estimate that as many as 60 percent of deaths resulting from maltreatment go unreported or are mistakenly attributed to accidents or Sudden Infant Death Syndrome.

_A parent is involved in 83 percent of child fatalities caused by abuse or neglect.

_Children under age 1 accounted for 41 percent of such fatalities in 2001.

Source: The National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect Information

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Cases of child abuse increase

By Chet Brokaw, Associated Press Writer March 13, 2004

PIERRE — The number of substantiated cases of child abuse and neglect has more than doubled in the past four years,

so South Dakota is stepping up its efforts to help troubled families, an official says.

"We're seeing a steady and gradual rise in our workload, our caseload," state Social Services secretary Jim Ellenbecker said this week.

Ellenbecker discussed the problem recently with South Dakota lawmakers before the Legislature finished work on next year's state budget. The Social Services Department's budget calls for adding nine aides to help social workers, but some lawmakers wondered whether the extra spending was necessary.

Ellenbecker told the Joint Appropriations Committee that the department dealt with 2,249 cases of substantiated child abuse and neglect in the 2000 budget year. The department expects to deal with about 5,300 cases this year and more than 5,800 cases in the budget year that begins July 1, he said.

The number of children that must be removed from their parents also is increasing to an estimated 2,500 next year. Some parents lose their children permanently.

Ellenbecker said the additional nine aides will free up existing social workers for more direct work with parents, such as training that prepares them to take better care of their kids.

"I believe our child welfare system is in crisis, and this request helps us address that crisis," Ellenbecker told lawmakers. A review by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services last year found that state social workers were not providing enough direct services to families with abused and neglected children.

The additional nine aides can perform some nontechnical tasks, Ellenbecker said, which will allow the existing 178 trained social workers to spend more time with families.

Social workers provide some direct education and training, and they also get parents ready to enter formal classes on parenting.

Lawmakers asked whether the increase in cases of abuse and neglect reflects a breakdown of society. Ellenbecker said the cases primarily are due to drug and alcohol problems among the parents.

"We're not winning the war, folks. Right now, we're losing," he told the Joint Appropriations Committee.

Susan Randall, executive director of the South Dakota Coalition for Children, said she is pleased that the Legislature approved the extra aides to deal with the increase in abuse and neglect cases. "It is alarming," she said of the increase. Schools also are reporting an increase in children with serious emotional disturbances, and those emotional problems are frequently caused by troubles in the children's homes, Randall said.

While the Social Services Department is dealing with existing cases of abuse and neglect, those who work to improve the lives of children should also look for ways to prevent abuse, Randall said.

Sen. Bill Napoli, R-Rapid City, said he worries about the growth of government. When the budget was being put together, he asked whether hiring the extra aides would cause the Social Services Department to search and identify more cases.

"I don't believe we search for cases," Ellenbecker responded. "They are brought to us."

In the end, the Appropriations Committee voted 16-2 to keep the additional nine aides in the budget.

"All this does is prove one thing, Secretary Ellenbecker," Senate Appropriations Chairman Jerry Apa, R-Lead, said.

"There's too many people out there having kids and not taking care of them."

Apa sarcastically suggested that instead of hiring nine aides for social workers, maybe the state should find nine doctors to sterilize parents who mistreat children.

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N.J. Supreme Court clarifies questions over parental rights March 18, 2004

TRENTON, N.J. -- The state Supreme Court has clarified the circumstances under which child welfare officials can aggressively seek to end the parental rights of suspected child abusers.

Although state law says the Division of Youth and Family Services must try to reunite families, the agency can bypass those efforts if it can prove "aggravating circumstances" that make it too dangerous for a child to be returned to their biological parents.

However, the definition of what that constitutes had long been open to debate. The ruling issued Wednesday defines it as "severe or repetitive" abuse and circumstances created by the parent's conduct that "create an unacceptably high risk

to the health, safety, and welfare of the child."

The court also said DYFS can immediately seek to end the parental rights of those convicted of serious crimes, such as murder or rape of a child, or someone whose parental rights regarding another child were terminated in another case.

The decision, written by Justice Virginia Long, upholds a ruling made by a state appellate court which developed the definitions the top court affirmed in its ruling. It stems from a 2001 case in which DYFS tried to end a New Jersey man's parental rights regarding his three children, ages 16, 10, and 9.

They children were placed with their grandparents in Florida after the 10-year-old came to school with bruises and welt marks. Their father was charged with assault and child abuse and later admitted to the beating as a form of discipline, but said it was a "grievous error" and unsuccessfully sought to have the children returned. They are now in foster care because their grandparents health has deteriorated.

While the Supreme Court's ruling requires the trial judge to take another look at the father's case, it did not overturn the decision to terminate his parental rights.

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DYFS revamp likely to gain an agreement

Conditional approval would allow agency to start implementing the \$320 million plan

BY SUSAN K. LIVIO Star-Ledger Staff March 19, 2004

After daylong negotiations yesterday, state officials and a court-appointed panel of experts are expected to announce today an "agreement in principle" on plans to remake the failing Division of Youth and Family Services, sources close to the talks said last night.

The conditional agreement would allow the state Department of Human Services to start implementing its \$320 million reform plan while continuing to negotiate changes sought by the New Jersey Child Welfare Panel, which is monitoring the effort as part of a federal court settlement.

Human Services Commissioner James Davy yesterday asked for the panel's approval for the reform plan he and Gov. James E. McGreevey announced a month ago. But the meeting turned into a marathon negotiating session as panel members called on the state to commit to additional changes, according to sources who spoke on condition of anonymity.

The closed-door discussions continued until about 9:30 last night, with debate over issues that included setting a firmer limit on the number of children a caseworker monitors and restructuring the DYFS bureaucracy, according to three

sources close to the negotiations.

Panel chairman Steve Cohen said yesterday he would have no comment on the negotiations until a 2 p.m. press briefing today.

The state needs the panel's approval for its reform plan under the terms of a settlement the McGreevey administration reached in June with Children's Rights Inc. The New York-based advocacy group had sued the state in 1999 alleging DYFS violated foster children's civil rights by trapping them in a mismanaged bureaucracy that put them at risk of abuse and neglect.

If the Child Welfare Panel rejected the state's plan, Children's Rights could haul DYFS to court and ask U.S. District Judge Stanley Chesler to impose a reform program.

One change on which the panel and Davy agreed yesterday is enactment of a policy preventing a child from being warehoused in a juvenile detention center if a judge has determined he or she needs to be in a residential treatment center under DYFS supervision.

Juvenile justice officials contend one-third of the roughly 950 kids in the state's 17 detention centers are there for petty crimes. What they need is mental health or drug treatment, but the state has no other place for them to live.

Davy also agreed to the panel's demand that the state more aggressively pursue changes to professionalize the DYFS workforce. Those changes include requiring managers and supervisors to pursue master's degrees in social work, and having the ability to hire experienced supervisors and managers from outside of DYFS. The state would have to negotiate those changes with the Communications Workers of America, the union which represents most DYFS employees.

Child welfare advocates and professionals have been generally supportive of the reform plan revealed last month because it spends a lot of money on what has traditionally been an overlooked yet vital state service.

The plan calls for the spending of approximately \$101 million over the next 2 1/2 years to hire 1,463 employees, most of them front-line caseworkers. It pledges to recruit 1,000 new foster homes by targeting neighborhoods where most foster children come from, and assigns caseworkers to support foster families. It commits \$63 million to substance abuse treatment and \$10 million to victims of domestic violence. Foster parents, as well as relatives who act as foster parents, would eventually get paid 25 percent more a month.

One of the landmark proposals involves limiting DYFS workers' caseloads to no more than 15 families, including no more than 10 foster children.

While that limit is an improvement over the status quo -- the average caseload is 42 families -- it's not the caseload "cap" the expert panel favors. The state's plan puts no limit on the total number of children in the average caseload. And there is no legal requirement that the limits be honored; it would be up to district office managers to make it so.

The expert panel -- as well as Children's Rights Inc. -- also wanted to see the state create a new department dedicated to children's services, sources said. Child welfare issues would then have its own representative in the governor's cabinet, rather than competing for the attention of the Human Services Commissioner, who must also oversee services to people with mental illness and developmental disabilities, the blind and the deaf, as well as Medicaid and the public welfare system.

Davy has opposed the idea. The state's plan does call for two new divisions -- one on children's mental health, another on community partnerships -- to be placed along with DYFS under the authority of a Special Deputy Commissioner for Children's Services. But critics have panned the restructuring, saying it creates a lot of new bureaucracy.

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Panel approves DYFS reform plan

By TOM BELL The Associated Press 3/19/2004, 5:07 p.m. ET

TRENTON, N.J. (AP) — After ordering a number of revisions, the independent panel put in place to oversee reform of New Jersey's child welfare agency tentatively approved the state's plan for an overhaul of the system Friday.

The state was ordered to come up with the plan when it settled a lawsuit filed by a children's rights group that sought to force changes at the Division of Youth and Family Services after years of problems and a series of horrific child abuse cases.

"The plan submitted by the state ... represented an impressive and comprehensive effort, backed by the commitment of substantial new resources that are essential to successful implementation, to solve long-standing problems," the New Jersey Child Welfare Panel said in a prepared statement.

The panel said parts of the plan needed revision to "strengthen and clarify some of the commitments" and ensure the plan could be successfully implemented.

"While it was very clear in its ambition, there is still a tremendous amount of detail to be added," said Steven Cohen, panel chairman.

The panel praised the state for committing more money to change DYFS and related sections of the Division of Human Resources.

"It commits the state to hiring enough staff to do the difficult and complicated work of assuring child safety, permanency and well-being, and to provide training for all staff in the skills they need to do this work well," the panel's statement said.

The panel said those steps must begin in the first six to 12 months of the plan's implementation. Other changes the panel wants to see require negotiations with the union representing DYFS workers, the panel members said.

Hetty Rosenstein, president of Communications Workers of America Local 1037, said the workers recently negotiated a contract that runs through June 2007.

"I don't really see how anything would change," she said of any additional negotiations.

The plan will require spending an additional \$320 million over the next 30 months, including \$180.3 million by June 2006 to hire nearly 1,500 caseworkers, supervisors and aides.

A \$125 million increase in DYFS' current \$550 million budget has yet to be approved by the Legislature, which is holding hearings on the state budget plan for the fiscal year that begins July 1.

The state has 45 days to make the revisions required by the panel. The panel, which is made up of five child welfare experts, hopes to submit the plan by June 2 to the federal judge overseeing the lawsuit settlement.

James Davy, newly appointed human services commissioner, said most of the revisions requested by the panel were minor.

"They believe that our reform plan was comprehensive," Davy said.

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DYFS panel accepts state overhaul plan

Published in the Asbury Park Press 3/20/04

By TOM BALDWIN
GANNETT STATE BUREAU

TRENTON -- An independent panel monitoring reform of the state child-welfare system has agreed in principle with New Jersey's plan to remake a system scarred by incidents where children have starved or died, officials announced yesterday.

"Today we take a giant, historic step forward," said James M. Davy, the acting commissioner of the Department of Human Services, which includes the existing Division of Youth and Family Services and would add two new divisions, under the plan.

The New Jersey Child Welfare Panel was appointed by a U.S. District Court judge to oversee the state's reform plans. Davy cautioned that the changes will not occur overnight.

"It is indeed a marathon, not a sprint," he said.

New Jersey had to produce the plan as a result of settling a lawsuit filed by a children's-rights group. That suit demanded an overhaul of DYFS.

Davy and panel Chairman Steven Cohen said the sides tinkered with the state's original plan, which was nearly 200 pages long, and made changes. Davy called them "fine points" and Cohen did not disagree.

"The plan submitted by the state . . . represented an impressive and comprehensive effort, backed by the commitment of substantial new resources that are essential to successful implementation, to solve long-standing problems," the review panel said in a prepared statement.

"I am grateful that the expert panel was so receptive to the child-welfare reform plan that we submitted," Davy said.

Under terms of the plan: The state would hire some 1,460 caseworkers and aides, plus supervisors. Workers dealing with troubled families will see reduced case loads, from what Davy said were as many as 43 children per worker, down to 15 families per worker. The state agrees to spend some \$50 million for five years assisting children from homes torn by domestic violence. Another \$30 million is to be spent on substance abuse services. There will be renewed emphasis on family meetings. The plan will require spending an additional \$320 million over the next 30 months, including \$180.3 million by June 2006 for the new hires. Foster parents would receive larger monthly stipends from the state, increases of about 25 percent. Payments to relatives raising kin would be increased to equal payments to foster families.

The Legislature has not yet approved a \$125 million increase in DYFS' current \$550 million budget for the fiscal year that starts July 1. That funding will be included in the overall state budget.

The state has 45 days to start making changes required by the panel. The plan is to be presented to the federal judge who heard the lawsuit June 2.

That suit was brought in 1999 by Children's Rights Inc., a New York advocacy group that accused the state of leaving children in a badly run bureaucracy that exposed youngsters to neglect and abuse.

A Camden County family fostering DYFS children is accused of not feeding the youngsters properly. A Newark child in DYFS care died, and it became known later that DYFS had neglected to visit the child to monitor treatment.

Panel lauds DYFS overhaul

By TRACEY L. REGAN Trenton Times Staff Writer March 20, 2004

TRENTON - Calling New Jersey's plan to overhaul its child welfare agency "impressive" and "comprehensive," the court-appointed panel overseeing the reforms nonetheless said yesterday that it had conditioned its approval of the plan on a number of changes.

The panel's directives for the most part called for more detail about the plan's execution and assurances that the state's strict new standards for dealing with abused and neglected children and their families were clearly spelled out.

The state child welfare agency will have to elaborate, for example, on how it plans to accomplish such basic goals as hiring hundreds of workers, recruiting new families to foster and adopt children and creating a training academy for its staff, members of the panel said.

The Division of Youth and Family Services will have to begin hiring more "frontline" caseworkers immediately, rather than waiting until July, when the new fiscal year begins, panel members said yesterday.

"This is a very impressive effort backed by substantial resources," said Steven Cohen, chairman of the five-member panel, who added, however, that there were still "a lot of details to be addressed" about how to put the plan in place.

But Cohen, of the Annie E. Casey Foundation in Baltimore, said the group stopped short of calling for a new cabinet-level department for child welfare services. Cohen said the panel was willing to defer to the judgment of McGreevey administration officials who insisted that the Department of Human Services could accomplish the reforms.

"But we reserve the right to come back in a year to 18 months and look at the organizational structure," he said.

The panel was created last year as part of a legal settlement between the state and Children's Rights, a child advocacy group that sued New Jersey's child welfare agency over widespread problems in its foster care program.

The settlement put New Jersey's child welfare agency under court supervision, while requiring officials here to undertake immediate as well as long-term reforms.

The two sides reached an agreement late Thursday night on changes to the state reform plan, which was unveiled a month ago. The state has 45 days to incorporate them into its plan.

Cohen said the panel would decide over the next several weeks which elements of the plan would be enforceable by the courts. People familiar with the plan said those elements would likely include strict new standards for staffing levels, rules guiding caseworkers' interactions with families and children, as well as limits on their caseloads.

"They were long and difficult negotiations, but they tended to be about fine points," said Human Services Commissioner James Davy, who said he was "gratified the panel was so receptive to our reform plan."

Davy said the agency has already moved to comply with one of the directives. He has asked the Legislature for \$15 million in supplemental funding to hire some 275 workers over the next several months.

The state reform plan, a top-to-bottom overhaul of its child welfare agency, calls for \$125 million in new funds for next year, the hiring of hundreds of workers and a detailed overhaul of what officials here call a dysfunctional bureaucracy.

The reforms range from such basic fixes as establishing a centralized office with a single telephone number to receive reports of abuse to the creation of a cadre of nearly 200 workers to recruit, train and provide support to foster care families.

Cohen said yesterday that some of the reforms the panel is calling for will require talks with the union representing DYFS workers. The panel has said, for example, that the state should seek to hire more people with a masters of social work degree and that it should establish such incentives to accomplish this goals as providing tuition assistance and "salary differentials."

"The panel has the right to impose terms. Those terms aren't about details of union contracts, but about outcomes for children," he said, adding, "We recognize that other actors are involved, and that they must be dealt with in good faith."

The panel has also asked the state agency to "address the problem of low salaries and benefit levels in many of the non-profit agencies with which it contracts for services," lest there be a mass exodus from those agencies when the state starts hiring new workers at what are typically more handsome salaries.

Davy acknowledged the risk of a "brain drain," but said the state has not resolved how it will deal with the problem.

The panel expects to finalize its approval of the state plan by early June.

The budget for the state child welfare agency is currently before the Legislature, which has until July - the beginning of the new fiscal year - to approve it.

Marcia Lowry, executive director of Children's Rights, said yesterday she was disappointed the panel had stopped short of calling for a new cabinet-level department for children's welfare, but otherwise called the initiative "an excellent plan."

"I think we're in very good shape at this stage," she said. "This is a good plan for a plan."

Panel approves DYFS overhaul

N.J. would hire 1,500 caseworkers and add 1,000 foster homes under a \$321 million proposal to improve the agency.

By Mitch Lipka

Inquirer Trenton Bureau

March 20, 2004

New Jersey has agreed to add workers to its failed child-welfare system more quickly than originally planned as part of a \$321 million overhaul that was approved in principle yesterday by an oversight panel.

Nearly 1,500 workers would be added to the Division of Youth and Family Services in the next 2 1/2 years. The plan also calls for adding 1,000 foster homes.

The state's Department of Human Services initially had intended for the next round of hiring to start on July 1, but the panel wants 276 people to be hired as soon as possible.

The panel called the plan "impressive and comprehensive" and praised Gov. McGreevey's willingness to commit the resources they said it would take to reinvent DYFS, which has become known nationally for a series of tragedies last year.

Faheem Williams, 7, was found dead in Newark - the victim of beatings and starvation - after a DYFS caseworker closed an abuse complaint without ever seeing the boy or his brothers. And in a home in Collingswood that DYFS workers had visited numerous times, police found four adopted brothers whom authorities say had been starved over a period of years.

McGreevey has included \$125 million in his fiscal 2005 budget for the changes, but some key legislators have said they would need more convincing before they approve adding that kind of money.

The state's plan is contingent on a series of changes being made within 45 days. It then must be forwarded to a U.S. District Court judge for final approval. It's not clear what would happen if legislators refused to approve all the spending called for in the plan.

The agreement, which followed weeks of discussions that continued until Thursday night, was expected. Mainly, the negotiations involved accelerating timetables and providing more detail on how the state intended to achieve the changes outlined in the plan.

"We do not believe it is in the state's interests to be engaged in a three- to four-year reorganization," panel member Judith Meltzer said. "Reorganization, by its very nature, is disruptive."

Had the panel rejected the plan, the advocacy group Children's Rights Inc. - whose 1999 lawsuit and its settlement last year led to the overhaul - could have gone back to court to force the state to make changes.

Children's Rights executive director Marcia Robinson Lowry, who sued New Jersey over the treatment of children in state custody, was pleased with the progress.

"This is an important step. We're not there," she said. "The state has to make sure they put this in writing... and more importantly, they have to implement it."

Lowry said she was particularly satisfied with how the panel of experts reviewing the plan as part of the settlement has

steered the state.

However, she objected to the panel's reluctance to press the state to create a separate children's services department that would report directly to the governor. Human Services Commissioner James Davy opposes such a separate department.

Lowry said she's concerned that Davy has too many other issues to deal with that could distract him from changes being made at DYFS.

But Davy said it is an asset to DYFS that he also oversees mental health and other programs that benefit children.

One detail that emerged from two public hearings held on the plan earlier this month is agreement that nonprofit child-welfare providers need help in raising their salaries and improving benefits for their workers.

Davy said he and panel members fear a "brain drain" of these workers when DYFS begins to accelerate its hiring. These nonprofits scattered about the state are considered vital to the success of the plan.

Kevin Ryan, director of the Office of the Child Advocate, said he is impressed with the plan.

"This is an ambitious blueprint that is more comprehensive than any child welfare reform plan I have ever reviewed," he said.

He cited as key components: a centralized abuse and neglect hotline, caseload limits for DYFS workers, a training academy for workers, the involvement of other state agencies, and abuse-prevention programs.

Among the changes not universally embraced is the dismantling of the state's Adoption Resource Centers by the end of 2005, which means caseworkers in local offices would once again have to handle adoptions.

Hetty Rosenstein, president of a union that represents caseworkers, said closing the centers is a mistake. She said she also was concerned that the plan called for negotiating changes in the contract with her union.

The plan calls for hiring preferences for supervisors with master's degrees in social work and reviewing hiring, discipline and performance evaluation procedures.

"We have a contract in place where we negotiated fully our terms and conditions of employment," Rosenstein said.

Rosenstein said she was willing to listen to what the state had to say, but added, "I'm not sure what they're getting at."

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Panel Approves Overhaul for Child Welfare System

By LAURA MANSNERUS NY Times March 20, 2004

TRENTON, March 19 - Nine months after New Jersey agreed to independent oversight of its Division of Youth and Family Services, the panel appointed to supervise the agency has approved the state's ambitious plan to reorganize the child welfare system.

But the oversight panel, in an agreement with state officials reached Thursday night, insisted on several changes, including a faster timetable for hiring additional case workers and completing the reorganization of the child protection agency, including the phasing out of its adoption centers.

Concern about the adoption centers arose last fall, when four boys in Pennsauken, N.J., were found to have been

systematically starved by their adoptive parents. Caseworkers at the regional center helped to place the boys but did not monitor them after they were adopted.

The oversight panel called for revisions to the plan to be submitted in 45 days. But, citing "an agreement in principle," the panel said it would forward the plan to the Federal District Court as part of a settlement of a five-year-old lawsuit against the state.

The state's plan calls for hiring about 1,400 new employees, including 1,000 child care workers, which would increase the division's staff by about one-third. The panel required that new hiring begin immediately, rather than wait for the beginning of the new fiscal year, on July 1.

The plan limits caseloads to 15 cases for each worker and creates a separate staff of investigators to handle reports of abuse and neglect. It also raises reimbursement rates for foster families and improves recruitment and training of foster and adoptive parents.

State officials submitted their plan Feb. 18, about a year after the turmoil in the child welfare agency came to light when a 7-year-old boy, Faheem Williams, was found dead in his basement in Newark. The agency had closed the family's file 11 months earlier and had failed to investigate a subsequent report that he and his brothers were being abused.

In June, state officials agreed to independent oversight in the settlement of a suit brought by Children's Rights Inc., a Manhattan-based advocacy group.

In January, anticipating that the first reorganization plan for the division would not be adequate, Gov. James E. McGreevey appointed a top aide, James M. Davy, to replace the commissioner of human services and rework the plan.

The three-member oversight panel conducted public hearings on the plan, consulted with the plaintiffs in the lawsuit, took recommendations and then reviewed suggested changes with agency officials.

Steven Cohen, the chairman of the panel, said Friday that the plan was "a very impressive effort."

Mr. Cohen said that "there's still a tremendous amount of detail to be added" and that the panel would monitor the amendments closely. He added, however, that "the bottom line for us is we think this is a significant accomplishment by the state."

Both Mr. Cohen and Mr. Davy said they expected a final plan to be ready for the Federal District Court in Newark by June 2.

As for the agency's reorganization, Mr. Davy said, "I expect the process will take several years, yet there is no doubt it will get done."

The overhaul is expected to cost \$125 million in the next fiscal year, starting July 1, and \$180 million in the following year. Andy Williams, a spokesman for the Department of Human Services, said the department was seeking another \$15 million for the agency in the current fiscal year. The agency's current budget is about \$500 million.

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State to act on fate of hospital for troubled kids

DYFS reform could shut Brisbane facility

BY SUSAN K. LIVIO

Star-Ledger Staff

March 20, 2004

The future of New Jersey's only psychiatric hospital for children will be decided within the next 45 days as part of an agreement announced yesterday between the state and a court-appointed panel on a \$320 million plan to remake the Division of Youth and Family Services.

Human Services Commissioner James Davy also pledged to speed the hiring of 1,000 front-line DYFS workers, adding at least 276 by July 1, to begin reducing crushing caseloads that now average 42 families per worker to a planned limit of 15.

These are among a handful of changes the state agreed to make to its sweeping DYFS reform plan during a daylong meeting Thursday with a panel of experts monitoring New Jersey's child-welfare reforms under the terms of a federal court settlement.

The meeting resulted in an "agreement in principle" between the New Jersey Child Welfare Panel and the administration of Gov. James E. McGreevey. The panel gave its approval to the state's reform plan on the condition that by May 3, Davy details how he will phase in the changes.

"This plan is a landmark, and it is a beginning," Davy said.

The reform plan, unveiled last month, includes hiring 1,463 employees, recruiting 1,000 more foster parents, and changing how the agency investigates cases and monitors families. It implements a system to automate case tracking, increases the monthly stipend for foster parents and relatives who act as foster parents and spends \$58 million more on drug treatment.

The New Jersey Child Welfare Panel is expected to submit the plan to U.S. District Court Judge Stanley Chesler on June 3. If the state does not live up to the terms of the plan, the judge could impose sanctions and order action.

The suit was brought in 1999 by Children's Rights Inc. on behalf of the state's foster children. After several high-profile child deaths, the state agreed in June to settle the lawsuit, overhaul the agency, and accept federal court oversight for years to come.

Members of the panel yesterday praised the state's blueprint for being "impressive, comprehensive and backed by the commitment of substantial new resources."

But they also said it is far from complete.

Panel members insisted the state develop "a plan to resolve the status" of the 40-bed Arthur Brisbane Child Treatment Center in Wall Township, although they declined to say whether they believe it should close. The panel has "significant concerns, based on reports and information from many people," Chairman Steve Cohen said in a press conference yesterday.

Child advocates have long sought the closure of Brisbane, where an overcrowding problem required court intervention over a decade ago to remedy. A teenage girl suffocated there six years ago after workers restrained her. A plaintiff in the Children's Rights lawsuit alleged he had been raped at Brisbane.

The facility also has a chronic problem of retaining children who have been cleared for discharge because the state lacks other mental health facilities to treat them. The Office of the Child Advocate is currently investigating conditions at Brisbane.

"We have very grave concerns about the conditions of care there," Child Advocate Kevin Ryan said. Equally troubling, he said, is the lack of alternatives for troubled children who need long- and short- term residential care.

Davy told the panel he would address that, along with the related problem of removing what is estimated to be hundreds of kids in juvenile detention centers who belong in treatment.

"The sooner the state implements its promise to release children into appropriate placements, the better," Ryan said.

Marcia Robinson Lowry, executive director of Children's Rights, Inc., said she fully expects the hospital will be shut.

"Brisbane needs to be closed. We think it's a harmful place for children," Lowry said. "If it were not to be closed, (we) would go back into court over it."

Overall, Lowry said she was "very satisfied with the plan" except for one point -- Davy's refusal to create a new cabinet-level department for children's services. DYFS is one division in an \$8.3 billion Department of Human Services that also includes agencies serving the poor and the mentally, developmentally and physically disabled.

Cohen said the expert panel also wanted to see a new department created to focus solely on children's services but did not insist on that change at this time.

"We are willing to defer to (Davy's) judgment, given the fact he has to run this," Cohen said. "We have reserved the right to come back in 18 months, and if we believe the structure isn't working, we won't hesitate to do something about that."

Davy, however, said any problems will be addressed within the Office of Children's Services, which is in his department.

"We will not be creating a separate agency," he said.

Cecilia Zalkind, executive director of the Association for Children of New Jersey, a statewide advocacy group, agreed with Davy, saying that to create a new bureaucracy "would take needed energy away from implementing the immediate steps that are urgently needed."

Other changes the state agreed to make in its reform plan include:

"Strengthening and further professionalizing" the DYFS work force by hiring supervisors with master's degrees and offering financial incentives for current staff to further their education. Within a year, the panel will evaluate hiring, training, promotion and disciplinary practices to see if changes are needed.

Hetty Rosenstein, president of Communications Workers of America Local 1037, which represents DYFS workers in northern and central New Jersey, responded: "These are wage issues. We're always glad to talk to people, but we have a legally binding contract good until June 2007."

Appointing a task force to develop a plan within six months to "address the problem of low salaries and benefit levels in many of the nonprofit agencies" that provide services to children and families under DYFS supervision.

Adding a limit on the number of abuse and neglect investigations that "intake workers" may handle. They will not be allowed to have more than a dozen open cases at once.

Rosenstein praised this addition but said she was disappointed both sides had not tightened up the caseload limits for workers who supervise families. Although the plan sets a goal of having workers handle no more than 15 families at a time, there is no limit on the number of children in a caseload.

"We need to know that essentially workers are not going to go above this cap," Rosenstein said. "If it's not clear, and there are loopholes, reform is not real."

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Star-Ledger Editorial

DYFS off the drawing board

Sunday, March 21, 2004

The state's plan for reforming the Division of Youth and Family Services has won preliminary approval with minimal changes. That means the agency can begin hiring more caseworkers, expanding foster care and providing the training, supervision and backup to keep children safe.

The plan was cleared by the panel of child welfare experts assigned to look over DYFS's shoulders as part of a lawsuit the state settled with a children's advocacy group. There was never much doubt about approval because panel members sat at DYFS's elbow and offered advice as the plan was drafted.

What matters is not what is written but whether things get done. That requires a commitment from the Legislature to provide all the funding the agency needs: \$320 million over 2 1/2 years. Most of DYFS's horror stories are rooted in the state's penny-pinching failure to do what one commission and panel and study after another have been telling New Jersey to do for years.

Whether the money is well-spent will depend on how flexible the court-appointed panel and DYFS will be if the game plan does not work as expected. Like some who testified at hearings on this reform, we remain concerned about a new emphasis on keeping kids in their families and neighborhoods and making families partners in DYFS decision-making.

In some cases, neighborhood drug and gang problems are the child's problem. In others, kids must be rescued from their families. The emphasis must be on what best works for each child, not on inflexible philosophy.

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State lays out plan to find foster parents

\$1.7 million phase targets hard-to-place kids

BY SUSAN K. LIVIO

Star-Ledger Staff

March 25, 2004

State Human Services Commissioner James Davy announced the first phase of a foster parent recruitment effort yesterday aimed at kids the state has the most trouble placing in homes: teenagers, drug-addicted infants and Hispanic children.

The \$1.7 million project by the Division of Youth and Family Services pledges to add 145 foster homes over the next 10 months by relying on the networking skills of religious-based organizations and community social service agencies.

This is one piece of a wider effort to add 1,000 foster homes and overhaul New Jersey's child welfare system to meet the requirements of a federal court settlement within the next 2 1/2 years, Davy said.

"Recruiting quality (foster) parents will be crucial to our success in reforming the child welfare system," Davy said at a briefing in Trenton.

The state's short-term plan for foster parent recruitment was actually due in the latter half of 2003 as part of a federal court settlement in June between the McGreevey administration and Children's Rights Inc. of New York, which had charged DYFS violated the rights of foster children. Since the settlement was reached, the state has not spent \$1.5 million of the \$1.7 million allocated.

Steve Cohen, chairman of the independent panel of experts monitoring the state's reform progress on behalf of a federal judge, called this short-term effort "not a bad place to start."

"It's a pretty reasonable plan," said Cohen, a senior fellow at the Annie E. Casey Foundation. "The need for additional foster homes is clear and they have done a pretty good job ... consistent with what they are trying to do in the (larger) reform plan -- working with community agencies, and getting people through the (foster home licensing) process quickly and respectfully."

The plan would award \$175,000 contracts to three existing foster home recruitment agencies to find and manage 45 homes for teens in Middlesex, Essex and Camden counties -- targeting youths waiting to leave detention centers and shelters.

The state also will spend \$150,000 to find 15 foster homes for "boarder babies," newborns who are drug-addicted or sick and cannot leave the hospital maternity ward because they have no home.

The state also will award \$150,000 each to four religious organizations to recruit 60 foster homes in Newark, Camden, Trenton and Paterson, where there is a high concentration of foster children. Unless the children would not be safe in their neighborhoods, Davy said, "The state wants to keep them close to home so they have consistency of relationships, -- with the faith-based community, with their schools, their friends, their teachers, with the coaches, neighbors."

The plan also directs \$332,000 to find, support and manage 25 foster homes for Hispanic children in Cumberland, Hudson and Passaic counties.

Walter X. Kalman, a foster parent and executive director of the New Jersey chapter of the National Association of Social Workers, said the state's interim plan sounded promising. He hopes the state ensures these new foster parents are prepared to care for challenging kids, some of whom will no doubt have behavioral and mental health problems.

"These foster parents need support and training, and intensive case management," Kalman said. "Recruiting is one thing, supporting is another. Are they are going to be doing both adequately?"

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