

June 16, 1995

Senator Nathan Tanner
Representative Lloyd Frandsen
Members of the Human Services Interim Committee

Subject: Child Welfare Outcome Measures (Report #95-04)

Dear Legislators:

We have reviewed the Division of Family Service's (DFS) initial attempts to develop outcome measures as required by House Bill 265 and this letter is our response to these attempts. Among other requirements, House Bill 265 (1994 General Legislative Session) requires DFS to "... develop quantifiable outcome measures for the key elements of each area in the child welfare system, including foster care and other substitute care, child protective services, and adoption." It also requires the Director of DFS to submit these outcome measures to the Legislative Auditor General for review before the measures are finalized.

DFS is still developing and finalizing the outcome measures. While we have reviewed the initial drafts and given DFS management our input, a final review by our office will have to wait until DFS staff and management complete their work. DFS management, staff and outside interest groups have met several times to discuss what outcome measures would be appropriate. Several draft documents have been prepared which list proposed outcome measures. The measures proposed thus far and reviewed by our office appear reasonable. In general, the measures relate to how well DFS is accomplishing the mission of protecting children and preserving families. However, we believe the measures can be improved to provide DFS' management even better information. Since DFS is still revising and reworking these measures there is still adequate time to enhance their management information system before the measures should be finalized in October 1995. Besides not finalizing their outcome measures, DFS has not yet determined how outcome measures will be used by management and staff within each region and how this information will be collected. When DFS has finalized their work in these areas we can provide you with a follow-up letter if you so desire.

In addition to preparing these outcome measures, DFS is still working to consolidate their

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management information and evaluation systems. Currently, several groups are providing management information and evaluation. Supervisors within the district offices review a random sample of cases for adherence to policy and legal requirements. Also, research staff prepare quarterly "Success Variables" which are statistical comparisons among regions. The Success Variables compare such factors as number of children with adoption as the goal who have not yet been adopted, number of referrals where the investigator was unable to locate the family, and other important factors. Also, within the Department of Human Services but outside the Division of Family Services, an evaluation unit is conducting case file reviews for adherence to law and policy. Finally, DFS is developing a customer satisfaction survey to obtain input from foster parents, children and natural parents on the services provided by DFS. DFS management is currently working to consolidate the information prepared by these groups to develop a more systematic management information system.

In addition to integrating the various sources of information into a complete management information system, we also believe DFS management will have to develop performance standards to make the information more useful to those working in the division and those outside the division interested in monitoring ongoing performance. These performance standards might be based on comparisons among regions, comparisons with other states, comparisons with standards from professional organizations, or longitudinal comparisons over time.

DFS is developing outcome measures in ten program areas. These program areas are: Adoption, Child Protection Services, Consumer/Client Satisfaction, Foster Care, Health Care, Home-based Services, Independent Living, Shelter Care, Training and Youth Services. A complete list of the initial measures proposed by the division in April 1995 is attached to this letter. We discuss below the outcome measures developed in two of the ten areas as examples of what DFS has done and the input we have given to make the measures more useable to us and others.

Example One--Adoption. Adoption is one of the most important aspects of DFS's mission. The desired outcome established by DFS for the adoption program is that: "Children who have a goal of adoption will receive expeditious and supportive delivery of DFS services". How well this goal is being achieved is to be measured through the following two indicators: (1) "percentage of available children placed in adoptive homes;" and, (2) "number of adoptions finalized". We believe these measures provide some useful management information.

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However, we believe that developing more measures will improve management's understanding of what is happening within the agency and how delivery of services can be improved. For example, another, and in our opinion, more significant measure of how well DFS is achieving the goal is: whether the goal of adoption is appropriate for all children whose case file has adoption as the goal, and whether these children are adopted on a timely basis. Obtaining the information for this measure is more difficult than the first two measures. This measure could only be developed through reviewing a sample of case files for children who have the goal of adoption. The reviewer analyzing the case would have to judge the appropriateness of the goal and timeliness of achievement for each case based on social work experience, laws, policies and accepted social work practice. Perhaps this review could be incorporated as part of the on-going case file review efforts explained above. DFS agrees with our suggestion and is planning to develop outcome measures relating to this issue by using the results of casefile reviews.

Besides suggesting that DFS develop some more outcome measures in this area, we also recommend that DFS determine how the outcome information is to be used. We recommend that the results of the outcome measures be used to compare performance amongst regions and amongst individual workers. The causes of any differences could be determined through casefile and other reviews. Appropriate corrective action should be taken based on these findings.

Example Two--Independent Living. Independent living is another important part of DFS's mission and our review of this program area illustrates the steps needed to develop useful outcome measures. The desired outcome of independent living is: "Children leaving DFS custody at age 18 will be equipped with the skills necessary to be productive, contributing members of society". To determine how well DFS is achieving this goal, DFS is proposing to use the following measures: (1) "number of youth leaving DFS custody at age 18 who are employed or attending school (post high school) full time," and, (2) "number of youth leaving DFS custody at age 18 who are in an apartment living 'successfully' (i.e., capable of handling money, fixing meals and maintaining clothing)." As with the other indicator, this outcome measure can provide management with useful information. However, as with the previous indicator, we believe that DFS' management needs to analyze the reasons why outcome measures may differ amongst regions and staff and whether action to improve the Independent Living Program needs to be taken.

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These are only two examples out of ten program areas. We have made similar suggestions to DFS in the other eight areas and DFS is considering adding our suggestions in these areas as well. We hope this letter will help you in your deliberations about DFS' outcome measures. Please contact us if we can assist you further.

Sincerely,

Wayne L. Welsh, CPA
Auditor General

WLW:CLM:lm

Attachment I
Preliminary DFS Outcome Measures*

Program Area	Desired Outcome	Measures
Adoption	Children who have a goal of adoption will receive expeditious and supportive delivery of DFS services.	1) Percentage of available children placed in adoptive homes. 2) Number of adoptions finalized.
Child Protective Services	To protect children at risk of abuse and/or neglect and ensure that children and families who are the subject of DFS investigations will be treated in a timely and professional manner.	1) Percentage of investigations initiated on time. 2) Percentage of investigations completed on time.
Consumer/Client Satisfaction	DFS will have a 100% "very satisfied" client base.	1) Percentage of consumer responses marked very satisfied on consumer/client survey.
Foster Care	Children in DFS custody will be placed in appropriate, nurturing and time-limited (where applicable) settings in order to meet individual needs and encourage (healthy, normal, productive) development.	1) Percentage of children in custody over 12 months in "permanent setting" 2) Average length of time in custody. 3) Average number of placements per child.
Health Care	Children in DFS custody will receive timely and appropriate physical health, mental health and dental services.	1) Percentage of children receiving a health screening within five days. 2) Percentage of children receiving CHEC physicals within 30 days.
Home-based Services	Children and families receiving home-based services will be taught new skills and will be able to function more effectively as a result of DFS involvement.	1) Percentage of children receiving home based services who were diverted from placement in DFS custody. 2) Percentage of children returning home as a result of reunification efforts.
Independent Living	Children leaving DFS custody at age 18 will be equipped with the skills necessary to be productive, contributing members of society.	Percentage of youth leaving DFS custody at age 18 who are: 1) employed or attending school (post high school) full time. 2) in an apartment living "successfully" (ie. capable of handling money, fixing meals and maintaining clothing)
Shelter Care	Each child placed in shelter care will be safe, attend school, receive health check-up and emotional support.	1) Each child in shelter care will have one placement per episode. 2) Average length of stay in shelter.
Training	DFS workers will be competent and professional in delivering DFS services to its clients.	1) Percentage of new employees completing training prior to receiving a caseload.
Youth Services	Youth will be returned home safely and willingly.	1) Percentage of youth receiving services that returned home.

* Preliminary outcomes measures prepared by DFS in April 1995.

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