2018 G.S. S.B. 125 - Child Welfare Amendments

Sponsor: Sen. Wayne Harper
Analyst: Clare Tobin Lence
Committee: SS

Explanation
During the 2018 General Session, the Legislature passed S.B. 125, "Child Welfare Amendments," which required the Division of Child and Family Services to report any youth that had run away from care to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children database. The legislation also required the division to determine contributing factors to why the youth ran away, identify any adverse experiences the youth had while absent from care, such as sex trafficking, and to reconsider the youth's placement if necessary.

Issue of Interest
The Division of Child and Family Services provided this performance measure to the Social Services Appropriations Subcommittee: Runaways are entered into National Center for Missing and Exploited Children database (Target: 100%). When assessing performance for this report, the division determined that for the first three-quarters of FY 2019, only 18 percent of runaway youth episodes were reported to the national database (40 of 218 episodes). The division reported that they "looked into the reason for the low reporting numbers and found there was miscommunication of when to report a runaway and what constituted a runaway. The division is implementing steps to educate and train caseworkers in this area. Supervisors will make it a priority when communicating with their teams, an emphasis on properly documenting and who to document will take place and a review will be conducted during next fiscal year to monitor the outcomes of the increased emphasis and awareness."

Without legislative follow-up in the form of this report or a future report to the Social Services Appropriations Subcommittee, the division might not have identified the miscommunication. If that occurred, the intent of the legislation would not have been fully implemented. Further, Utah would be out of compliance with federal regulation to report runaways to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children database.

Potential Action
We recommend that the Division of Child and Family Services report the results of their FY 2020 review of caseworker compliance with the reporting requirements of S.B. 125 to the Social Services Appropriations Subcommittee during the 2020 Interim.

Human Services Response
Neutral "DCFS does not have a proper mechanism that can track the recommended data, while the division will consent to the decision of the Legislature."