



## The Association of Accredited Child and Family Agencies

### - Recommendations to Improve Child Welfare System -

The accredited agencies that make up AACFA serve over 40,000 children and families annually and wish to continue to partner with the Department of Health and Human Services to bring about better services to children and a successful exit from the settlement agreement, which is now named the Implementation Sustainability Exit Plan (ISEP). The AACFA agencies make up a diverse consortium of nationally accredited private non-profit agencies. When looking at statewide services it is important to note that the licensed private non-profit agencies are currently performing 99% of the state adoptions, 99% of juvenile justice services, 100% of residential care services, and 100% of the family preservation services. These services have all had very successful outcomes while the public system labors to meet federal mandates outlined in the modified settlement agreement. AACFA agencies have identified the major issues below that are causing barriers to an even better best practice service delivery model and recommendations to alleviate those issues.

#### **Separation of Child Welfare Issues**

Current Issue-Issues related to improving the lives of children lose their focus due to DHHS being such a large organization that not only administers items such as grants/aid but also provides mental health services.

Recommendation-Carve out a separate Child Welfare Agency that would specifically look at children's issues and how our public-private partnership can better meet the needs of children and families statewide.

#### **Contracting**

Current Issue-The contracting procedure that exists does not allow for discussion or negotiation. Contracts and amendments are sent to licensed private non-profit providers with no forewarning or discussion. The existing contract language contains the following: DHHS may exercise its rights to terminate contracts or amend contracts "for convenience." DHHS may also "immediately" terminate contracts "in whole or in part without penalty and for any reason, including but not limited to, appropriation or budget shortfalls."

Recommendation-It is critical that licensed private non-profit Child Placing Agencies are at the negotiating table when contracts are being developed and amended. A workgroup needs to be formed to strengthen our public-private partnership in developing contracts and any amendments prior to those being issued.

## **Unpaid Case Work**

Current Issue-Placement Agency Foster Care (PAFC) licensed private agencies are providing services to many children that count against the 13 to 1 caseload ratio mandated in foster care contracts yet PAFC providers are not being paid an administrative rate for these cases. As the caseloads declined from 30 to 1 (pre-settlement agreement) to the current status of 13 to 1, these unpaid cases have taken up more resources from PAFC providers as unpaid cases now represent a greater percentage of a worker's caseload.

Recommendation-All unpaid cases that are included in the 13 to 1 ratio of a foster care worker at a licensed private non-profit agency should be paid by DHHS. The largest percentage of these unpaid cases are those where children are living with an unlicensed relative. DHHS has estimated that statewide private non-profit agencies are responsible for 591 children that are placed with unlicensed relatives, 148 children that are living in child caring institutions, and 80 children that are living with a non-custodial parent. These over 800 children constitute the three largest categories where the licensed private non-profit agencies have monitoring responsibility, yet are not being compensated for their services. The administrative rate for these cases needs to be paid to PAFC providers and those involving monitoring of children placed with unlicensed relatives need to be retroactive to 10/01/2018.

## **Structure of Child Welfare Institute (CWTI) training**

Current Issue-The current CWTI training system requires PAFC providers to enroll newly hired employees to travel away from their employer and family/home for multiple days in order to receive required training. The entire training takes 9 weeks and a worker cannot be assigned a full caseload until they finish the training and receive certification. The training is often far necessitating staying in a hotel for a week at a time, which is difficult for parents of young children to attend without placing undue hardship related to their ability to find supervision for their young children while they are staying in hotels. In addition, those staff working at licensed private non-profit agencies that demonstrate an ability to understand and process the training material quickly, are invariably recruited by those in attendance from DHHS as it is pointed out to the PAFC workers that state employees do enjoy a better salary and compensation package.

Recommendation- Allow PAFC agencies to provide CWTI training to their employees at the provider's place of employment via web-based modules. Also work toward conducting train the trainer type certification so PAFC providers can use the modules to hire and train qualified employees that are not able to travel away from home for multiple days at a time. Until a web-based system is created or PAFC providers are able to have their staff certified to conduct training in-house, PAFC providers should continue to be paid \$6,000 to compensate for needing to pay staff that complete training off-site as a full caseload cannot be assigned until the completion of training. Noble Child, a Michigan based child-welfare technology company, is ready and able to pilot web-based modules to meet requirements outlined by the state for CWTI.



## **Continue to Hold Counties Harmless**

Current Issue-Related to foster care payments, each county have been held harmless related to recent administrative rate increases paid to PAFC providers. This provision has a sunset clause.

Recommendation-Counties should continue to be held harmless as this practice needs to continue and be codified into law.

## **Goals**

Finally, we would recommend the following goals be adopted and put into practice as part of the collaborative efforts between DHHS and the private non-profit agencies that already deliver the bulk of services statewide. These are as follows:

- For clarity of focus DHHS should continue in their area of expertise that being the investigation of complaints by child protective services, regulatory responsibilities related to the issuance and continuation of various child welfare licenses and their fiduciary responsibilities related to payment of services rendered. Therefore, we recommend that licensed private non-profit agencies have all children placed in their foster care service systems while DHHS concentrates on the investigation and placement of those children suffering abuse and neglect.
- Licensed private non-profit agencies will continue to provide almost 100% of services in the areas of adoption, delinquency, residential care and family preservation as federal monitors have not needed to include these areas in the settlement agreement.
- DHHS will continue to find the needed mechanisms to pay both unlicensed relatives the foster care rate as well as the administrative rate to PAFC agencies that are monitoring these children and working on their permanency plans per the Glisson vs. Kentucky decision that mandated that funds be appropriated for these situations.
- DHHS will continue to work with federal monitors in their attempt to implement the ISEP thus allowing the state to work more freely without cumbersome standards imposed by federal monitors resulting from long standing issues in the foster care system.

