



Testimony of Diane DePanfilis
Maryland Appropriations Committee
Collaboration on Child Welfare Accountability
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I am Diane DePanfilis, Associate Dean for Research, and Director of the Ruth H. Young Center (RYC) for Families & Children at the University of Maryland School of Social Work. Over the past year, faculty and staff in the RYC collaborated with the Department of Human Resources, Social Services Administration to plan for an alternative response system and collaborated on three mandates of the Child Welfare Accountability Act of 2006: (1) to study the recruitment and retention of child welfare staff, (2) to evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of child welfare services; and (3) to implement a child welfare academy. This testimony will provide an overview of the key results of these efforts. In addition, copies of three reports have been provided to the Committee.¹

Implementing a Child Welfare Alternative Response System in Maryland

Nationally, more than half of the states have implemented child welfare reforms that permit alternative responses to reports of child abuse and neglect. These alternative response models recognize the variation in the nature of child maltreatment reports and that one approach does not meet the needs of every case. The benefits of implementing

¹ The three reports provided to the Committee are, as follows. Hopkins, K.M. & Cohen-Callow, A. (May 2007). ***Maryland child welfare workforce recruitment, selection and retention study project report***. Baltimore, MD: Ruth H. Young Center for Families & Children at the University of Maryland School of Social Work. Faraldi, S., & DePanfilis, D. (December 2007). ***Child welfare accountability: Evaluating quality assurance processes in Maryland***. Baltimore, MD: Ruth H. Young Center for Families & Children at the University of Maryland School of Social Work. Faraldi, S., Ovwigho, P. C., Shaw, T.V., & DePanfilis, D. (December 2007). ***Child welfare accountability: Annual report of Maryland performance indicators***. Baltimore, MD: Ruth H. Young Center for Families & Children at the University of Maryland School of Social Work.

alternative response systems have been documented in other states although there are many variations in place and questions remain unanswered about the optimal approach.

This is the third legislative session during which the process of implementing an alternative response system in Maryland will be considered. Last year, DHR/SSA presented an implementation plan that called for a pilot project to be planned between July and December 2007 with implementation to occur in July 2008. Faculty members in the RYC participated in this planning and support the new direction now taken by DHR/SSA to implement a statewide alternative response system, beginning in July 2008. Consistent with other goals of DHR's *Place Matters*, going statewide is predicted to permit Maryland to increase safety and permanency for more children. Anticipated benefits include: (1) the system of response will be better suited to the variety of conditions present in families involved in abuse and neglect; (2) the most serious cases will be readily apparent and immediate action will be facilitated; (3) individualized services and supports will be provided to vulnerable children and families; (4) parents will be more motivated to change the behaviors that threaten the safety of their children to avoid involuntary involvement with child welfare services; (5) more children will be protected over time by engaging parents in the process of sustainable changes; (6) the public responsibility for protecting children will be broadened; (7) the rate of recurrences of CPS reports will decrease; and (8) casework staff will have greater opportunities to see positive results of their work, possibly increasing job satisfaction and increasing workforce retention.

The implementation of alternative response should be shaped by evaluation because the new approach will require significant changes in the way that DHR, the courts, and community agencies perform. The RYC has agreed to collaborate with DHR/SSA to implement a multi-level evaluation of this system implementation. The evaluation will focus on the process, practice, and outcomes of this initiative. The process evaluation will describe the degree to which the alternative response system is implemented as intended. The practice evaluation will assess the quality of child welfare practice and decision-making (screening, risk assessment, and safety evaluation-management). The outcome evaluation will assess whether there are changes in the safety of vulnerable children who remain at home and in the pattern of placements of children into out-of-home care.

Child Welfare Workforce Recruitment, Selection & Retention Study

The University of Maryland School of Social Work, in collaboration with the Maryland Department of Human Resources, completed a study of child welfare recruitment, selection and retention processes. Karen Hopkins served as the Principal Investigator. The study was authorized in order to help DHR develop effective strategies to increase the hiring and retention of competent child welfare services staff. The specific **purpose** of this study was to understand factors related to the turnover of Maryland's child welfare workforce and to identify strategies for improving recruitment, selection and retention.

Method: The study's conceptual model reflects the many factors expected to influence child welfare workers, including organizational structure, organizational and psychological climate, personal characteristics, and measures of job and work withdrawal, job search behavior, and turnover. Data were collected from DHR and local DSS databases, and self-report surveys, focus groups, and exit interviews of a representative sample of 811 child welfare workers, supervisors, and administrators in all 24 jurisdictions.

Key Findings:

- At the state level, **turnover** has been increasing for the last three years, with rates increasing from 9.1% in 2004, to 17.1% in 2005, and to 20.3% in 2006.
- Primary reasons for turnover: (1) stress/"burnout" from the job; (2) negative organizational environment/climate; (3) Caseload/work overload; (4) low salaries; (5) lack of professional development; (6) lack of supervision; and (7) few promotion opportunities.
- Need for changes in job and organizational structure:
 - Average FTE **salary** for Maryland child welfare line workers (\$44,213) should be increased so that it is comparable to other similar state government service employees who are first responders (i.e., police - \$48,536; nurses - \$45,832) and to teachers (\$51,065, for 10 months).
 - Greater differential in pay between supervisors and workers.
 - Current compensation system is grounded in tenure and promotion which should be changed to be based on achievement, growth and development.
 - Interview and selection processes/protocols should be standardized and consistently applied across DSS agencies.
 - New employees should be provided more adequate preparation for the job (training, coaching and mentoring) at the time of "on boarding". (This is now being addressed by the Child Welfare Academy.)
 - Employees are provided with basic organizational resources to do their jobs (i.e., cell phones/pagers, working state cars, clerical and transportation support staff, effective technological systems).
- Organizational climate/environment had the most significant impact on employee behavior and turnover. Critical issues that need to be addressed include:
 - High levels of workload "stress" --- *emotional exhaustion, role overload*
 - *Low morale --- job satisfaction and organizational commitment*
 - Few "esteem" rewards (respect and appreciation)
 - Exclusion from decision-making
 - Safety concerns related to client violence
 - Lack of management and administrative support
 - Low career commitment
 - Lack of recognition for growth and opportunities for advancement

Recommendations:

1. Implement evidence-based interventions shown in other states to effectively improve organizational climate and reduce turnover.
 - baseline data already collected,
 - implement change strategies to improve organizational climate through local department "facilitated action teams",
 - monitor and measure results over time, using longitudinal research design.
2. Develop mechanisms for recognizing and rewarding effective performance, collaborative efforts, and personal accomplishment.
3. Create a culture that promotes open communication, flexibility, and participation in decision making to foster employee engagement.

System for Measuring Efficiency and Effectiveness of Child Welfare Services

Effective January 1, 2007, the Maryland Department of Human Resources (DHR) Social Services Administration and the University of Maryland School of Social Work (SSW) entered into an agreement to implement an outcome-based system of accountability for measuring the efficiency and effectiveness of child welfare services for children and families in the State of Maryland. This work was undertaken under the direction of faculty at the SSW: Diane DePanfilis, Principal Investigator, Catherine Born, Co-Principal Investigator, and Sarah K. Faraldi and Terry V. Shaw as Co-Investigators. The purposes of the work conducted in the first year was to create a baseline of a wide array of performance indicators—some in common with federal indicators but most of them unique to Maryland—and to provide technical assistance about how the outcome-based system of accountability should be further developed. The first two reports from this collaboration were submitted to the legislature in December 2007. A summary of findings follows.

Summary of Performance Indicators

Many of the indicators do not have state or federal benchmarks. One of the primary purposes of the first annual report is to establish baselines from which to measure the progress of child welfare services and outcomes over time. For some indicators national indicators have already been established by the U.S. DHHS. For those performance indicators with established targets:

- Maryland meets federal standards for promoting child safety by a minimal level of repeat maltreatment of children whose cases were recently closed.
- Maryland does not meet federal standards for promoting the safety of children in out-of-home care, although this is very difficult to measure and the numbers presented in this report are likely an overestimate of abuse or neglect of children while in state custody.
- Maryland ranks below the national median on most indicators measuring the achievement of permanency (e.g. reunification and re-entry rates), according to federal definitions.
- Sample-level quality assurance data suggest that out-of-home placements are reasonably stable, on average, and concerted efforts are generally made to preserve children's connection with siblings in out-of-home care when appropriate.

Recommendations for Improved Outcome Measurement

Based on the project team's extensive experience in defining outcome measures for child welfare programs and policies, and after thorough assessment of existing Maryland performance indicators, faculty and staff at the UMB/SSW offer the following recommendations for strengthening the ongoing evaluation of the efficiency and effectiveness of child welfare services in Maryland:

1. Continue to develop the Children's Electronic Social Services Information Exchange (CHESSIE) to more effectively and routinely report on the outputs and outcomes of child welfare services in Maryland.
2. Redefine the core set of performance indicators to match the federally-mandated performance indicators.
3. Track entry cohorts of children over time to allow for better assessment of program change.

4. Examine the trajectories of service use for children and families over time.
5. Explore differential outcomes for subgroups of children and families.

Summary of Quality Assurance Evaluation

Local Self-Assessments

- Information requested in the local self-assessment provides a comprehensive picture of the department. This information can be used for multiple purposes, including accreditation, which reduces burden on the local department.
- There was wide variation in data sources for data profiles and level of sophistication analyzing and presenting data.
- Assessments of “areas needing improvement” were weak.

Onsite Maryland Child and Family Services Reviews

- Stakeholders appreciate the in-depth review of cases; case-related interviews greatly enhance the review process.
- There has been a long waiting period for final reports to be shared with local departments.
- Community stakeholders are underrepresented on review teams.

Program Improvement Plans (PIP)

SSA has not fully developed the local PIP process. Of the twelve sites reviewed in 2007, initial PIP planning meetings have been made with three. No sites have PIPs ready for implementation. Ongoing development of the PIP process is a priority in 2008.

Local Supervisory Reviews

There were many challenges with the original supervisory review process implemented in 2007. The QA collaborative has been working to address these concerns. The revised local supervisory review process that is currently in the pilot stage of development:

- Is an important step toward incorporating QA into everyday practice,
- Provides an automated tool to increase efficiency and reduce error,
- Incorporates a reporting mechanism to share feedback with local departments on a regular basis.

Recommendations to Improve Quality Assurance Processes

1. **Improve sampling strategies for Quality Assurance.** Incorporate the Local Supervisory Review into everyday practice by using it to meet COA supervision requirements of quarterly review of every case. Strategically select the MD-CFSR sample based on problem areas identified in the local self-assessment.
2. **Offer technical assistance to local departments.** Comprehensive data profiles should be compiled for the department using CHESSIE data. Targeted technical assistance and training should be provided around Program Improvement Plans, including identifying evidence-based practices and implementation strategies and designing program monitoring plans.

Implementation of the Child Welfare Academy

In April 2006, The Maryland Department of Human Resources and the University of Maryland School of Social Work initiated a partnership to provide the locus for the development, provision, and coordination of multi-faceted child welfare education and training efforts, as mandated in the Child Welfare Accountability Act of 2006. The mission of the Academy has been established as: *To develop, educate, train, and support Maryland's child welfare staff, supervisors, administrators; foster parents, and kinship caregivers to provide family centered; culturally competent services to protect children from maltreatment, achieve permanency, and promote child well-being.* The Child Welfare Academy is organizationally placed within the RYC in the School of Social Work and focuses on staff training and educational preparation of social workers to practice in public child welfare agencies. Caroline Burry is Principal Investigator and Debra Linsenmeyer is Educational Director.

Training

- Engaged national curriculum experts to assist SSW and DHR staff and to redesign and implement a new curriculum to replace the prior 9-day curriculum. This 21-day competency based pre-service training was provided to newly employed DHR child welfare workers, supervisors, and administrators incorporating DHR's Family Centered Practice model, Maryland Family Risk Assessment Tool, and Safety Planning Tool
- Provided pre-service training to 307 new DHR child welfare workers at locations in Baltimore City, Prince George's County and Talbot County
- Developed and implemented a range of training opportunities designed specifically for DHR's child welfare supervisors (Excellence in Public Child Welfare Supervision 10 month seminar, Introduction to Supervision in Child Welfare, The Supervisor's Role in Pre-service Training)
- Recruited and funded 10 current exemplary child welfare workers to participate in MSW education to prepare for supervisory roles in Maryland Child Welfare Services
- Provided focused supervisory training to 153 DHR child welfare supervisors and administrators
- Developed and implemented individualized access to continuing education for 188 veteran child welfare workers focusing on specific child welfare skills and knowledge competencies
- Arranged for social work licensing preparation for 50 DHR child welfare workers, supervisors, and administrators
- Provided in-service training to 1,698 current DHR child welfare supervisors, supervisors and administrators with topics such as drug affected newborns; effects of abuse and neglect on child development; access to education/mental health and health services for children; ethics in child welfare practice; preparing children for adoption; and cultural competence in child welfare
- Developed and implemented regionally accessible in-service training for 180 foster, kinship, and adoptive caregivers
- Proposed a plan to make portions of pre-service training web-based and to introduce video conferencing of in-service training to address transportation and logistical concerns of Western Maryland and Eastern Shore Counties

Title IV-E Education for Public Child Welfare Program

- Prepared 65 MSW students and 12 BSW students for public child welfare practice with employment commitments to DHR after graduation through specialized coursework, practice seminars, and internships in Local Department of Social Services

- Collaborated with Salisbury University to increase Title IV-E field placements on Maryland's Eastern Shore (12) and with Morgan State University to develop additional Title IV-E education opportunities in Baltimore City (12)
- In collaboration with DHR, placed 60 Title IV-E Graduates in public child welfare positions in Local Departments of Social Services

NOTE:

Sections of this testimony were contributed by Rick Barth, Sarah Faraldi, Karen Hopkins, and Debra Linsenmeyer of the Ruth H. Young Center for Families & Children at the University of Maryland School of Social Work.