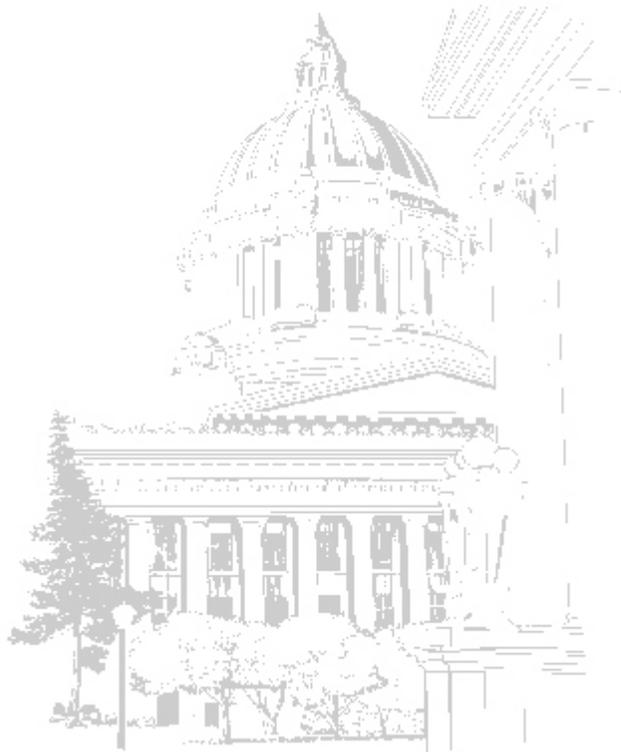


PRELIMINARY RECOMMENDATIONS
FROM THE JOINT TASK FORCE ON CHILD
SAFETY FOR CHILDREN IN CHILD PROTECTIVE
SERVICES OR CHILD WELFARE SERVICES
CUSTODY



December 2005

**JOINT TASK FORCE ON CHILD SAFETY FOR CHILDREN
IN CHILD PROTECTIVE SERVICES OR CHILD WELFARE SERVICES**

**Preliminary Findings and Recommendations
December 2005**

Background

In 2005, SHB 2156 created the Joint Task Force on Child Safety for Children in Child Protective Services or Child Welfare Services Custody to review issues related to safety of children in the care of the Department of Social and Health Services.

The assignment of the task force was to review and make recommendations to the legislature and the governor on improving the health, safety, and welfare of Washington children in child protective services or child welfare services custody.

The legislation required the task force to look at the following issues in preparing its recommendations:

- (a) State and federal statutes regarding child safety, placement, removal from the home, termination of parental rights, and reunification with parents;
- (b) Current and ongoing department of social and health services work groups or work plans regarding child safety, placement, removal from the home, termination of parental rights, and reunification with parents;
- (c) The purpose and value of child protection teams and determine whether any changes should be made;
- (d) Best practices regarding children removed from parents at birth and placed in out-of-home care, transition services for families with children in out-of-home placement for an extended period of time, and standards for return to home placement when a child has been placed out-of-home including situations where a child has been placed out-of-home and returned to home multiple times;
- (e) The training that is offered to social workers regarding child development and determine whether any changes should be made;
- (f) Best practices regarding sharing of accurate, complete, and relevant medical, mental health, and substance abuse information between case workers, supervisors, the courts, child protection teams, counsel, guardians, parents, and other relevant participants in child placement decisions;
- (g) Best practices for assessing and addressing chemical dependency issues of parents;
- (h) The effectiveness of current home-based service providers currently used and determine whether any changes should be made;
- (i) Best practices addressing family cultural and tribal issues and the role, if any, of social worker training or bias in safety assessment and placement decisions; and
- (j) Other issues deemed relevant to improving child safety outcomes.

The task force is required to report its preliminary findings and recommendations to the Legislature by December 31, 2005, and provide a final report on its findings and recommendations by September 1, 2006.

Membership

The task force includes the following members:

Senator Jim Hargrove
Representative Bill Hinkle
Representative Ruth Kagi
Senator Dale Brandland
Melissa Allen, Department of Health, Maternal and Child Health
Robin Arnold-Williams, Dept. of Social and Health Services
Danielle Baxter, Foster Parent Association of Washington State
Charlotte Booth, Institute for Family Development
Rick Byalock, Cascade Recovery
Linda Collins, Child Welfare Services
Yolanda Duralde, M.D., Mary Bridge Childhood Abuse Intervention
Steve Hassett, Office the Attorney General
Hon. Margie Hutchinson, Colville Business Council
Linda Katz, CASA Program
Amy Kernkamp, Child Protective Services, DSHS
Shelly Lacy, Tulalip Tribe
Laurie Lippold, Children's Home Society of Washington
Gary Malkasian, Foster Parent
Byron Manering, Brigid Collins
Mary Meinig, Office of the Family & Children's Ombudsman
Joanne Moore, Office of Public Defense
Michael Petcu, Birth Parent
Joan Sharp, Washington Council for Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect
Chief Colleen Wilson, Washington Association of Sheriffs and Police Chiefs
Judge Diane M. Woolard, Superior Court

The task force created an Executive Committee which consisted of the following members:

Senator Jim Hargrove
Representative Bill Hinkle
Representative Ruth Kagi
Senator Dale Brandland

Legislative staff assigned to the task force:

Sonja Hallum, Counsel, Office of Program Research, Children and Family Services Committee
Edith Rice, Counsel, Senate Committee Services, Human Services and Corrections Committee

Meetings

The task force began its work on August 23, 2005. Members received overviews of federal and state law, the child welfare system, fatality reviews from both the Office of the Family and Children's Ombudsman (OFCO) and the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS), and a summary of recommendations from previous task forces, work groups, and studies relating to child welfare reform in Washington.

The task force met four times from August through November 2005. Meetings were held in Olympia.

Findings

1. Numerous studies and reports have been prepared over the years discussing the child welfare system and system reforms in Washington.
2. Several efforts are currently underway to review specific issues in the child welfare system including the Braam Oversight Panel, the Commission on Children in Foster Care, and the Task Force on the Administrative Organization, Structure, and Delivery of Services to Children and Families.
3. The child fatality reports conducted by the DSHS and the OFCO highlight many areas of concern regarding the current child welfare system.
4. The DSHS has made efforts to address many problem areas within the Children's Administration (CA) and the child welfare system; however, much remains to be done to improve the quality and consistency of system.
5. The task force will utilize work previously completed relating to child welfare reform, and not duplicate efforts to review specific areas that are being conducted by other work groups, such as placement issues being reviewed by the Braam Oversight Panel.

Recommendations

1. The Task Force shall continue its work in 2006 by forming subcommittees to review specific topic areas in greater detail. The subcommittees will report to the full committee with findings and recommendations no later than July 1, 2006.

2. Subcommittees will be formed to review the following areas:
 - a. Intake and Investigation;
 - b. Caseworker and supervisor workload;
 - c. Services, including on-going services after a child is returned home;
 - d. Internal and external review, including oversight and accountability; and
 - e. Caseworker and supervisor training and support.
3. No later than April 15, 2006, the subcommittees shall submit a work plan to the Executive Committee that lists the issues upon which the subcommittee will focus during its meetings. The Executive Committee will review and approve the work plan.
4. The goal of the Task Force, and each subcommittee, shall be to develop recommendations designed to maintain the safety and well-being of children and improve child welfare practice. The focus shall be a greater emphasis on training, better consistency of practice and service delivery, early identification of familial child welfare issues, early family engagement in appropriate services, and the prevention of unnecessary placements of children in the foster care system.