

**COMPILATION OF
RECOMMENDATIONS
FROM PREVIOUS REPORTS
RELATING TO WASHINGTON'S
CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM**

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The Joint Task Force on Child Safety for Children in Child Protective Services or Child Welfare Services
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WORK LOAD RECOMMENDATIONS

Policy and Procedure

1. Maintaining a reasonable workload, which matches up staff skills and experience with client risk, is critical to successful outcomes for children and families. Past management studies of CPS have addressed the barriers to workload management. Many changes have resulted in improvements in this arena reduced caseloads, automation, addition of clerical staff, training for staff and supervisors, improved management skills, and increased compensation. However, the fact remains that line staff turnover continues to be as high as 50% per year in some units with stress, fear of failure and low job satisfaction cited as underlying reasons. Barriers to reasonable workloads include relentless change and new demands for accountability. This increases staff time spent in training and case documentation, and decreases time available for children, families and community networks. Efforts to simplify and streamline operations are outpaced by new policies and procedures, which add complexity. DCFS must support its casework staff by ensuring a manageable workload, the resources to do their job, and a hospitable work environment . *Advisory at 20.*
2. CPS workers' caseloads should allow them to meet department policy and "best practices" standards. *OFCO at 2 (Robinson Review).*
3. Funding allocations for staff should be increased and realigned to bring caseloads more in line with the CWLA standard. The DSHS and Governor's budget should contain a well-documented request for a supplemental budget allocation to significantly reduce caseload, and the legislature should respond positively to such a budget request. *Fatality Review at 2 (Grace Review).*
4. The Division of Children and Family Services should evaluate the workload requirements of the various types of referrals and redistribute its workforce as appropriate. *JLARC at 15.*
 - a. The JLARC report states that their analysis identified the time expended during the intake screening process as a key factor that heavily influences the initial assessment. This suggests that the accuracy of the initial assessment increases in proportion to the amount of time spent researching the referral. JLARC also found that the lower the caseload per caseworker, the less chance that the initial risk tag is downgraded, further suggesting that the quality of the initial assessment is influenced by the thoroughness of the initial analysis. *JLARC at 12.*

5. Social worker caseloads must be significantly reduced. The current average caseload of 29 far exceeds the national standards, and severely limits social workers' ability to thoughtfully manage each family's case. The state should move towards the Council of Accreditation practice standard of 20 cases per caseworker. *Fatality Review at 2 (Nobles Review)*.
6. Area and Regional Administrators should be required to monitor caseloads of line workers, and develop a response plan when caseloads exceed an acceptable level. *OFCO at 2 (Robinson Review)*
7. Rather than allow workers to be overloaded when an office has many vacancies, the agency should establish a process to formally waive work on specific tasks so that standards can continue to be met on priority tasks. Riveland at 16..
 - a. Staff vacancies present another barrier to workload management. Some positions are vacant for up to six months. This increases the actual workload for those remaining, increases the number of workers managing a single case and increases the time it takes to resolve a case.
8. Social workers should not receive more than eight new referrals a month. *Fatality Review at 2. (Champagne-Loop Review)*
9. A "response to workload crisis" or some other "emergency plan" protocol needs to be developed, either regionally or statewide, to respond to surges in workload created by vacancies or increased referrals. *Fatality Review at 2 (Robinson Review)*
10. Effort by CA to study workload should be continued. *Fatality Review at 2. (Robinson Review)*

Role of Supervisor

11. Streamline the hiring process. If reasonable workload increases successful outcomes, then eliminate the barriers to recruiting and retaining a full complement of staff. Put the burden on regional administrators and area managers to keep the hiring process moving quickly. DSHS should work with the Department of Personnel to establish continuous recruitment lists from which eligible candidates can be pre-qualified and hired quickly. *Riveland at 16.*
 - a. Turnover and vacancies also contribute to bad outcomes. Turnover creates a "revolving door" with less experienced workers entering and seasoned workers leaving for work that provides them less stress and/or more job satisfaction. Staff and supervisors complain that managers are out of touch with the new realities of case management. Some

describe a trust gap that exists between management and staff.

12. CPS supervisors should not carry cases and conduct CPS investigations in addition to their responsibilities as a supervisor. The quality of supervisory reviews suffers when supervisors are also handling case investigations, as it does not allow adequate time for meaningful case reviews and worker support. *OFCO at 2 (Robinson Review)*

Administrative/clerical Support

13. Provide additional administrative/clerical support staff to reduce the paperwork and document management requirements for CPS workers. Make greater use of other para- professionals or volunteers to assist in non-critical duties. *Riveland at 19.*
14. We strongly recommend that DCFS hire sufficient clerical and paralegal staff to allow social workers to focus on case management and family contact. *Fatality Review at 2 (Nobles Review)*

Practice Areas

15. Create other methods for communicating change with managers, such as email and teleconferencing, so that more time can be spent accompanying workers in the field. *Riveland at 16.*
16. Eliminate duplication of effort in case documentation, e.g. writing down then entering in CAMIS, often two people recording the same information. The pilot projects examining use of audio and/or video recorders should be accelerated. *Riveland at 19.*

Bibliography

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