

Recent Cases of Child Neglect and Abuse: Strengthening the Response

- Thank you for the opportunity to address this important topic, childhood trauma, that impacts the future of Montana in so many ways - as you have been hearing about the past two days.
- The Child and Family Services Division (hereinafter CFSD) has taken many steps to strengthen its response to allegations of child abuse and neglect since Summer 2011.
- However, CFSD also understands that Montana children cannot be kept safe from abuse and/or neglect unless we truly collaborate with other community partners: law enforcement, county attorneys, medical providers, schools, public health, and others. This is not work that can be done successfully alone!
- There were three major areas that the Governor had asked that CFSD take a close look at last summer, and they were:
 1. Policy on Mandatory Reporters;
 2. Use of Multidisciplinary Teams, Child Protection Teams, and team decision-making in our cases; and
 3. The Centralized Intake structure for Montana's Child Abuse Hotline.
- The following is the summary of steps taken to evaluate and make changes in these 3 areas:
- Policy on Mandatory Reporters:
 - The policy of CFSD has changed to require that any time a report is investigated where the reporter is a mandatory reporter, the Child Protection Specialist (Social Worker) is now required to contact the mandatory reporter as part of the investigation. (Previously, no contact with mandatory reporters was required during investigations of abuse or neglect).
 - The policy of Centralized Intake is also in the process of being updated to include the requirement that the Centralized Intake Specialist inform the reporter of whether the report will be assigned for investigation by the field.
 - This ensures that mandatory reporters have the opportunity to speak directly with the worker assigned to investigate the allegations that the mandatory reporter called into Centralized Intake to ensure that all of the information that they have is directly provided to that investigating worker.
 - In addition, CFSD is in the process of reviewing internal legislative requests for next session, and CFSD will be asking for legislation to allow it to share information back with mandatory reporters, so they know what response has been taken in regards to the report they have made. Under the current confidentiality statute, MCA 41-3-205, CFSD is not allowed to share this type of information.
 - That is why the current policy that requires the social worker to talk to the mandatory reporter and gather information (v. share information back about

our response) and policy that will allow the reporter to know whether a report will be investigated is the best that CFSD can do in the interim and in the absence of a change in statute.

- Use of Multidisciplinary Teams, Child Protection Team, and team decision-making in cases:
 - CFSD has actively encouraged all offices to become part of multidisciplinary teams in their local communities. This effort has led to a partnership between CFSD and the Department of Justice's Children's Justice Center. The focus of these teams is generally cases of serious physical abuse, sexual abuse, and now drug endangered children too. At last count, there were seventeen active multidisciplinary teams in the State. CFSD continues to attend team trainings and believes there will be more teams in the near future.
 - CFSD has also actively encouraged all local Supervisors to strengthen and/or create local child protection teams. These teams are focused on the civil child abuse and neglect cases and help to ensure that all important community stakeholders have input into difficult cases. At last count, more than 45 active child protection teams were meeting across the state.
 - Since last summer, CFSD has also changed its internal policies to require that Permanency Teams (headed by Permanency Planning Specialists) review all cases within 30 days. This includes review of cases that are not filed in court but are only voluntary service agreements. Previously, there was no internal team review of these types of cases. CFSD believed that additional oversight on these cases was critical.
 - These internal team reviews not only address permanency from a long-term perspective, but also look at whether initial safety decisions being made are adequate to keep children safe. They also help assess whether children should be removed from the home, remain in the home under a safety plan, and whether children who have been removed should be returned home. These teams consist of CFSD social workers, supervisors, licensing workers, family group decision-making meeting coordinators, and can include county attorneys, child protection unit attorneys, guardian ad litem, and/or CASA volunteers too. All cases are staffed repeatedly by these teams throughout the life of the case to ensure safety, permanency, and well-being objectives are being achieved.
 - CFSD continues to work to strengthen the understanding of all of its employees regarding the importance of teamwork in our cases. Further training on this topic is planned for the May 2012 supervisors meeting.
 - Specific training on multidisciplinary team work also occurred in Great Falls in October 2011. Experts were brought in from Denver, Colorado to discuss accurate medical diagnosis of child abuse and neglect, law enforcement and CPS integration of investigations, and other topics that were related to improving multidisciplinary investigations of child abuse and neglect.

- A pilot position has also been recently created in Great Falls to assist the multidisciplinary team there. This is a CFSD full-time position who will receive specialized training in facilitation and coordination of multidisciplinary teams. CFSD is committed to ensuring that work is done to improve multidisciplinary responses to allegations of child abuse and neglect, and this is an opportunity to explore an innovative solution to keeping children safer in a community that has seen more than its fair share of serious cases of abuse and neglect over this past year.
- In regards to Centralized Intake:
 - CFSD has re-organized so that Centralized Intake is now part of the field operations and is overseen by the Field Services Administrator
 - This means that closer scrutiny is paid to seamless integration of the field and Centralized Intake so that information gets to the field more quickly and accurately.
 - Policies and procedures regarding what information is gathered during calls and how calls are categorized have been updated and refined to better assess safety.
 - Additional FTE have been added to Centralized Intake to try to ensure adequate staffing patterns and more prompt reporting to the field.
 - A survey of reporters and staff is currently taking place in regards to gathering feedback as to how reporters believe Centralized Intake could be improved.
 - At this time, over 1200 responses to the survey have been received.
 - Some of the results are as follows:
 - The largest number of responders to the survey up to this point have been health and mental health professionals, schools, and law enforcement;
 - Nearly 75% of respondents indicate that they have a good understanding of what child abuse and neglect are under state law;
 - The vast majority of calls, over 80%, are answered within 2 minutes; and
 - The largest issue cited by reporters is that they do not know if their report is going to be investigated after they call.
 - This survey will continue to be available online on the CFSD website until May 1st. After that time, results will be compiled and analyzed, and CFSD will make decisions regarding whether to ask for additional resources to put a hybrid model into place or whether reporters believe that maintaining a centralized intake location, with additional changes to policy and/or procedure, would be a better option. These changes will then have to be implemented either by change in Administrative Rule or statutory changes. However, CFSD does not want to implement any significant structural changes until after it hears from reporters and after it determines if the legislature will impose any significant

statutory changes as well. It hopes that it will make changes only once, and that the changes made will be the right ones.

- In addition to changes made in these 3 areas of concern highlighted by our Governor last summer, CFSD has undertaken additional changes to keep children in Montana safer:
 1. CFSD continues to advertise and fill all vacancies immediately. As an example, in Great Falls, CFSD has implemented a continuous recruitment process so that vacancies can be filled without having significant time delays when positions leave. Additional temporary support positions have also been added to assist CPS workers in getting into the field and assuring that thorough and timely investigations can take place even when the office is not “fully staffed.”
 2. CFSD has also undertaken work with the University of Montana to look at ways to improve recruitment and retention in the future. There are several possible strategies being explored; however, in the midst of ongoing union negotiations, CFSD is not able to fully discuss this issue at this time. CFSD remains committed to recruiting and retaining social workers and addressing secondary trauma and its effects on the work force in its efforts to develop a well-qualified and steady work force.
 3. CFSD has implemented a new safety assessment called the Family Functioning Assessment. This assessment is part of an evidence based practice model that has shown improved safety outcomes for children in states where it has been in use for over a decade. The model is also supported by 35 years of research, and CFSD continues to work with experts to ensure that it is implemented with fidelity. CFSD is committed to ensuring the safety of children to the best of its ability through the implementation of best practices.
 4. CFSD is also partnering with the Children’s Mental Health Bureau on implementing the use of high fidelity wrap-around services in CFSD cases. This includes the use of functional assessments to ensure that the State is providing care to children that helps them to improve in their functioning and reduces trauma to these children.
 5. CFSD has changed the duties of two positions:
 - A. A budget analyst position is now a data analyst position. This position will ensure that CFSD collects and analyzes data regarding the use of resources to achieve the best possible outcomes for Montana children. This position will create evidence of what are best-practices in Montana v. having to rely upon other states data. This position will also help ensure that Montana is implementing evidence-based, trauma-informed practices that result in better outcomes for children in the child protection system.
 - B. A Tribal Contracts Manager position has been converted to a position titled the Tribal Services Administrator. This position is part of the CFSD Management Team and will ensure that work with Tribes is done better and will also work to address the issue of a disproportionate number of Native children in foster care (nearly 40%).

- In sum, there is no work more difficult than that done by a CFSD Child Protection Specialist:

- There are long hours, huge workloads, few resources, and little public praise that comes with the position.
 - I am truly grateful for the employees that have persevered through the past year.
 - It is my hope that we can find ways to support them and make them feel like the work they do is valued.
 - It will take all three branches of government coming together and collaborating to do to do the best possible work we can to keep children safe and families strong in Montana.
- Thank you for this opportunity to present this information today.