



COLORADO
Department of Human Services

February 3, 2015

Diane E. Ray, CPA
State Auditor
Office of the State Auditor
200 E 14th Ave.
Denver, CO 80203

Dear Ms. Ray:

The Colorado Department of Human Services received your request dated January 13, 2015 to provide an update on the steps taken by the Department in response to the August 2014 *Colorado Child Welfare County Workload Study*. The enclosed status report provides a brief explanation of the actions taken by the Division of Child Welfare within the Office of Children, Youth & Families to address the information contained in the Workload Study.

If you have any questions related to the status report, please do not hesitate to contact Julie Krow at (303) 866-5414 or julie.krow@state.co.us. Department representatives will attend the February 24, 2015 Legislative Audit Committee hearing to present the enclosed status report.

Sincerely,

Reggie Bicha
Executive Director

cc: Nikki Hatch, Deputy Executive Director
Julie Krow, Director, Office of Children, Youth & Families
Melissa Wavelet, Director, Office of Performance & Strategic Outcomes
Robert Werthwein, Deputy Director, Office of Children, Youth & Families
Ann Rosales, Director, Division of Child Welfare
Mette Boes, Director, Audit Division
Andrea Goldstein, Auditor, Audit Division



Status Report on the Workload Study

Auditor's Questions:

Question 1:

What steps has the Department taken to seek additional staff resources based on the results of the Workload Study? If additional staff resources have been requested, please explain how the Department anticipates these resources to be allocated among the counties.

Response:

CDHS is implementing the recommendation in a phased approach by increasing the staff over multiple years. For the first year, CDHS is applying for approximately 130 child welfare staff for counties in need of additional personnel. Accordingly, CDHS is requesting over \$8 million in funding for SFY 2015-16 as referenced in the Governor's budget as R-08 Child Welfare County Workload Study. Additional staffing will be requested in future years based on the Workload Study recommendation and the Child Welfare League of America's recommended ratio of caseloads for caseworkers and caseworkers assigned to supervisors.

The Department has been working closely with the counties through the Child Welfare Allocation Committee (CWAC), County Human Services Directors Association (CHSDA), Colorado Counties, Incorporated (CCI) and a Child Welfare Workload Study group consisting of members from various counties and State programs. Allocation of these resources if approved will be based on the recommendations from the above organizations.

Question 2:

What actions has the Department taken to change processes/expectations to address the results of the Workload Study? For example, has the Department identified processes that can be improved or streamlined to help improve the efficiency of the child welfare system?

Response:

Based on an independent study of Colorado's child welfare case management information system (SACWIS), also known as Trails, performed by Istonish, as part of the Governor's budget, the Department recommends and has submitted another SFY 2015-16 funding proposal for over \$6 million to modernize Trails. Trails is outdated which makes it a difficult and cumbersome system for caseworkers to perform the data management element of their jobs. According to the study, Trails could be modernized to expand the system's capabilities including its ability to share data with other departments and systems. Modernizing the system would create workflow efficiencies for Colorado caseworkers through easier navigation and simplified



reporting. This could include simplifying the capturing of data through document imaging technology, programming the system to automatically populate duplicative fields, and allowing remote access to the system through secure mobile devices. Better data on a faster efficient system will lead to improved efficiencies for child welfare staff and potentially lead to better outcomes for Colorado's children and families.

Question 3:

What additional steps does the Department plan to take to address the results of the Workload Study?

Response:

The Department has been meeting with Metro State University and University of Denver to expand its current stipend program to help promote and attract additional candidates into the child welfare workforce. In addition, the Department has met and has started talking with Colorado State University in Fort Collins and University of Colorado in Pueblo to start a stipend program with those academic institutions.

As discussed in question 1, the Department has been collaborating with the Child Welfare Workload Study Group, which consists of representatives from CDHS and Arapahoe, Douglas, Boulder and Mesa counties, on this important Workload Study. The Child Welfare Workload Study Group created suggested methods of addressing the results of the Workload Study on January 21, 2014, attached as Exhibit 1, entitled Child Welfare Workload Study Recommendations.



Child Welfare Workload Study Recommendations

The child welfare workload study was called for by the Governor in his 2013 "Keeping Kids Safe and Families Healthy plan". The Colorado Department of Human Services (CDHS) received \$500k to provide to the Office of State Auditor to have them conduct the study. The Office of State Auditor contracted with an outside entity to perform the work. The study presented to the Legislative Audit Committee by the Office of State Auditor (and contractor) in August 2014 concluded that Colorado's counties are significantly under-staffed. The study concluded that, "The estimated amount of time required to complete mandated child welfare activities and meet program objectives exceeds the amount of time available from the current number of Colorado child welfare caseworkers." While there are some questions about the workload methodology around estimating time for each activity, the data from the time data collector (actual work completed and entered) during the month of February, a shorter than average month, demonstrated that child welfare caseworkers are working more than 40 hours/week on average (see table 1). Even with these long work weeks, required mandates and desired outcomes for safety, permanency, and well-being are not met.

This report is a response to the study. Colorado counties and CDHS believe this study is a good first step in providing a clearer picture of the child welfare workforce needs. Colorado counties along with CDHS have and will continue to examine our current workload, staffing, operational efficiencies, and available funding to improve the delivery of services focused on making families stronger and keeping kids safe.

Table 1 – Workload Study – Average Child Welfare Hours Worker Per Week

	Percent of Hours Worked (40 hour week)	Actual Hours Worked
Child Welfare Caseworker	112%	44.6
Child Welfare Supervisor	120%	48
Child Welfare Manager	120%	48
Child Welfare Support	92%	37

The study notes that the Governor's "Keeping Kids Safe and Families Healthy" plan has included new "child welfare initiatives and pilot programs...that will affect the workloads of county child welfare workers" including:

- Expanding Differential Response to counties beyond the initial five pilot counties
- Rolling out RED (Review, Evaluate, Direct) teams statewide
- Enhanced screening tool implemented statewide
- Evidence-based prevention initiatives such as, Colorado Community Response, SafeCare, Nurse Family Partnership
- Statewide Child Abuse Hotline

Additionally there has been an expansion of other child welfare initiatives as part of the Federal Title IV-E waiver:

Exhibit 1

- Increase in Family Engagement meetings required at established times throughout the life of a case
- Permanency Roundtables for all youth with an Other Planned Permanent Living Arrangement (OPPLA) goal or in care over one year
- Expanded kinship supports
- Trauma informed assessments and interventions

The Colorado child protection system's main purposes are to keep children safe from harm and, once this safety is assured, keep families together. Maintaining children safely in their homes is an important step towards the long-term goals of ensuring tomorrow's healthy adults, a solid workforce, and healthy communities. In Colorado, these goals are particularly challenging because of the state's high percentage of families and children living in poverty. The state's high level of childhood poverty results in comparative greater levels of child welfare involvement with lower-income families and higher rates of out-of-home placement.

Aware of the challenges, the counties and community partners have embraced the Governor's Child Welfare Plan and other initiatives. Under the Governor's Plan, child protection agencies are, for the first time, able to work on preventing child abuse and keeping children safely in their homes. These efforts, such as engaging families earlier, focusing on behavior change, and creating a foundation to stop both generational abuse and poverty will ultimately benefit Colorado communities. These efforts are not possible without having adequate numbers of qualified child welfare staff.

Counties agree that these are great practice improvements and enhancements that the State should continue to support. It has been shown that more time spent on these practices has improved outcomes. However, they also drive increased time invested on the part of caseworkers and supervisors for the practices to be delivered with fidelity. This increased workload needs to be factored into the evaluation of workload/caseload.

To address the under staffing of caseworkers and supervisors in the child welfare system, counties recommend a strategic increase in the child welfare workforce followed by a gradual ramping up of resources to support program growth.

PROPOSED SOLUTIONS:

Recommendation #1: Support the Governor's 2015-16 funding request for \$8,227,138 adding 130 child welfare staff to counties in need of additional personnel. Counties would have the flexibility to hire who they need for their county (caseworkers, nurses, case aides, educational specialists, etc.)

Increases in staff will impact child welfare outcomes - Although the workload study did not specify the impact of an adequately funded and supported child welfare workforce, it is logical to believe there is a high correlation between staffing levels and the amount of direct work that can be done with families.

Increases in staff will allow us to standardize caseload ratios - This study did not recommend a caseload size, but rather focused on workload or what time it takes to complete certain child welfare activities. Both approaches are helpful in determining how to assign cases to caseworkers. Workload studies from several states and from the Child Welfare League of America were reviewed and the recommended caseload for caseworkers is ten. The recommended ratio of caseworkers assigned to a supervisor is five (see Table 2).

Exhibit 1

Recommendation #2: Work collaboratively with CDHS to develop a plan to modernize Trails (also included in the Governor's 2015-16 budget requests)

Trails is Colorado Child Welfare's automated case management system - Currently, Trails is outdated which makes it a difficult and cumbersome system for caseworkers to perform the data management element of their jobs. According to the study, Trails could be modernized to expand the system's capabilities. Modernizing the system would create workflow efficiencies for Colorado caseworkers through easier navigation and simplified reporting. This could include simplifying the capturing of data through document imaging technology, programming the system to automatically populate duplicative fields, and allowing remote access to the system through mobile devices.

Recommendation #3: Formulate a strategic recruitment and retention plan for child welfare related occupations

Retaining Colorado's Caseworkers is critical to serving children and families and achieving sustainable outcomes - Staff turnover creates vacant caseloads that need to be absorbed by existing staff. The workload burden created by vacancies adds to already high stress and pressure filled jobs.

Recruiting top talent is just as critical to retaining top talent - Ensuring there is an adequate pipeline of qualified workers for the occupations within the Child Welfare system is paramount to not only meet the needs of statewide vacancies but will help address any strategy to increase the number of staff as recommended in the workload study. Partnering with our academic institutions will be critical to addressing the workforce development needs of Colorado's child welfare occupations labor market.

Recommendation #4: Conduct a workload and system efficiency follow-up study

Creating system efficiencies will allow caseworkers the opportunity to spend more valuable time serving children and families - According to the study, improving operational efficiencies in the child welfare process could help provide more staff time and resources to counties for delivering services within current resources. This could reduce the amount of additional resources needed to meet requirements and achieve desired outcomes.

Possible improved child welfare outcomes with implementation of proposed recommendations

1. Reduced re-abuse of children
2. Fewer children will re-enter foster care following reunification with parents
3. A higher number of children will be reunified with their families within 12 months
4. Colorado will decrease the number of children who have been in foster care two years or more
5. Colorado will decrease the number of children in congregate care

Recommendations will improve two process outcomes

Exhibit 1

1. Increase Timeliness of initial Response
2. Increase Timeliness of Assessment Closure

Tasks that will improve above outcomes

1. Caseworkers will increase their contact with parents
2. Family finding – relative placement increase – increased father engagement
3. Improved parenting time along with increased parent time