



# SUMMARY REPORT

## *of Interim Committee Activities*

November 2023

### Colorado's Child Welfare System Interim Study Committee

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**Committee Members:** Representative Mary Young, Chair, Senator Rhonda Fields, Vice-chair  
Senators Barbara Kirkmeyer, Dafna Michaelson Jenet, and Rachel Zenzinger  
Representatives Brandi Bradley, Monica Duran, Gabe Evans, Meg Froelich, Junie Joseph, and Rose Pugliese

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### Committee Charge

Colorado's Child Welfare System Interim Study Committee was created pursuant to Interim Committee Request Letter 2023-01 and was authorized to meet up to five times during the 2023 interim. The committee was charged with taking a holistic look at Colorado's child welfare system to address the major factors facing the system in order to better serve the state's children and families. The areas to examine could include, but were not limited to:

- child abuse and neglect rates, types, and recurrence of abuse in Colorado;
- laws and regulations governing child welfare practices at the federal and state level;
- judicial processes related to child welfare practice;
- processes for child abuse and neglect cases including reporting, investigation, and removal;
- current systems and supports including the Colorado Trails System, the Core services program, out-of-home placement services including kinship and foster care, differential response, facilitated family engagement, and prevention and intervention services;
- challenges in the child welfare system including workforce challenges related to hiring and retaining county child welfare workers, social determinants of child welfare involvement, and the behavioral health needs for children, youth, and families; and
- the intersection of child welfare and juvenile justice.

### Calendar of Events

June 27, 2023

- Overview of the role of the Colorado Department of Human Services in the child welfare system
- Overview by county departments of human services on their role in the child welfare system
- Overview by the Judicial Department and independent state agencies on their role in the child welfare system



## Calendar of Events (Cont'd)

### July 18, 2023

- Overview of recent legislation pertaining to child welfare
- Presentations by organizations representing parents
- Presentations by foster and kinship care organizations and residential providers
- Presentation on the role of hospitals in the child welfare system
- Presentation from the Delivery of Child Welfare Services Task Force
- Presentation from the Colorado Child Welfare Abuse Prevention Board
- Presentations from the Department of Human Services Child Fatality Review Team and Colorado State Child Fatality Prevention Review Team
- Presentations from the Mandatory Reporter Task Force and Timothy Montoya Task Force to Prevent Children from Running Away from Out of Home Placement
- Panel discussions with biological parents, foster parents, kinship care providers, and youth with lived experience with the child welfare system
- Public testimony

### August 22, 2023

- Presentation from the National Conference of State Legislatures
- Presentation on perspectives from other states
- Presentation from Illuminate Colorado
- Presentations from the Kempe Foundation and Kempe Center
- Presentation from the Family Resource Center Association
- Presentation from the Department of Early Childhood
- Presentation on high acuity beds
- Presentation on the Colorado Trails system
- Public testimony

### September 12, 2023

- Presentation on child welfare funding
- Presentation on adoption
- Presentation from the High-quality Parenting Time Task Force
- Presentation on the Safety Assessment Tool
- Presentation on overrepresented populations in Colorado's child welfare system
- Public testimony
- Interim bill draft requests

### October 25, 2023

- Review of bill drafts and proposed amendments
- Public testimony
- Approval of interim bill drafts and committee letter to the Joint Technology Committee



### Recommended Legislation

As a result of committee discussion and deliberation, the committee recommends the following bills for consideration in the 2024 legislative session. Additionally, the committee sent a letter to the Joint Technology Committee (JTC) seeking the JTC's assistance in quickly transitioning the state to using a high-quality single Trails system.

#### ***Bill A – Kinship Foster Care Homes***

The bill outlines several procedures for kinship foster care homes, including measures pertaining to timely permanency planning, expanded emergency financial assistance, and data collection by the Colorado Department of Human Services and the Judicial Department on kinship placements. Additionally, the bill requires that relatives be informed about the types of kinship care options and financial supports available, both during court proceedings and through the development of an interagency resource guide.

The bill also establishes a formal process for certifying kinship foster care homes and defines the financial assistance rates available to certified and non-certified kinship foster care homes, county department reimbursement rates for kinship foster care, and the certification standards and training requirements for certified kinship foster care homes.

#### ***Bill B – Children's Behavioral Health Statewide System of Care***

The bill requires the Behavioral Health Administration (BHA) to develop and maintain a comprehensive children's behavioral health statewide system of care, in collaboration with other agencies. The system should allow children and youth up to 21 years of age to have a single point of access to behavioral health care regardless of payer, insurance, or income. The bill sets timelines for the BHA to develop the system of care and outlines what the system must include.

#### ***Bill C – High-Acuity Crisis for Children and Youth***

The bill creates and expands programs for youth who are currently in, or are at risk of being placed in, out-of-home care, including creating a system of care for youth that provides intensive care coordination and increases access to supportive services. Additionally, the bill expands eligibility for the Children's Habilitation Residential Program Waiver, requires evaluation of reimbursement rates for psychiatric residential treatment facilities, and continues and expands the Emergency Residential Treatment Program. The bill also requires the Colorado Department of Human Services to improve residential child care facilities by creating an academy to train residential child care providers, developing minimum standards and monitoring systems, and implementing an incentive system to improve performance.



**Recommended Legislation (Cont'd)**

***Bill D – Accessibility for Persons in Child Welfare Matters***

The bill creates a process to ensure proper language access to services for individuals with limited English proficiency. It requires county departments, cities and counties, and private-entity contractors to make reasonable efforts to ensure meaningful language access to services in a timely manner and without unreasonable delay. Courts are also required to ensure the provision of language access services in dependency and neglect cases and dispositional hearings. Finally, the bill requires that a language access plan be developed to address the rights and needs of persons with limited English proficiency, that staff be trained to identify persons with limited English proficiency, and that an accessible resource bank of translated common documents be developed.

***Bill E – Child Welfare System Tools***

The bill requires that reports of known or suspected child abuse or neglect include evidence of domestic violence in a child's home whenever possible. The Colorado Department of Human Services must create a consistent screening process for county departments to follow when responding to a report from the child abuse reporting hotline, review and modify the screening process used by county departments and hotline system operators in determining demographic and ethnicity information, and develop a disclosure system that notifies callers that calls to the child abuse reporting hotline are recorded.

The bill also requires the Office of the Child Protection Ombudsman to contract with a third-party evaluator to conduct audits on the Colorado Family Safety Assessment and the Colorado Family Risk Assessment tools.