

Task Force on Strengthening the Child Welfare Workforce for Children and Families
WebEx/Conference Call

October 21, 2020 – 10:00-11:00a.m.
MINUTES

MEMBERS PRESENT (in person)	MEMBERS PRESENT (via phone)	MEMBERS ABSENT
N/A - WebEx	Sen. Julie Morrison	Sen. Robert Peters
	Rep. Mary Edly-Allen	Rep. Steven Reick
	Sen. Craig Wilcox	Rep. Mike Marron
	Denice Murray	Jan Stepto-Millett
	Mark Stutrud	Sarah Tucker
	Anne Irving	Lisa Jones
	Betsy Goulet	
	Paola Baldo	
	Deb McCarrel	
	Royce Kirkpatrick	
	Sen. Steve McClure	
	Rep. Karina Villa	

I. Welcome and Call to Order

Kate Smith took roll call. It was determined that a quorum was present. The meeting was called to order.

II. Review and Approval of Minutes

Deb McCarrel motioned to approve the minutes.
Betsy Goulet seconded to approve the minutes.
Minutes were approved.

III. Recommendations

Sen. Morrison: I am hoping that everyone has looked at the report that has been produced. We need to make sure that we are conveying clear information. I would like to work through chronologically the report and ask if there are any changes in the literature review portion. I thought it was very well done. I don't hear any comments, so I assume that everyone is very happy with it. Okay, the literature review takes us down to the child welfare employer survey. That is chapter three – both methods and results.

Deb McCarrel: I did have some issues with this portion. I don't know if it is actually reflective of what is going on. I have discussed this with some providers. This is reflective of the national staff. The numbers do not reflect our actual numbers for the state. I don't think the survey was answered by a CEO. There is a possibility that the answers were

portrayed to make the agency look better than it was. I have raised these issues with some of the other foster care agencies and they seem to agree. I don't want to put out a 24% turn-over rate when that is not reflective of what our agencies are reporting as actually happening.

Sen. Morrison: That's why we're doing this today.

Deb McCarrel: I don't feel like this is a good stat for us right now. I just got a call this morning from one of our largest foster care systems is at 60%. They cannot get people to come into the field. They just lost two workers and a supervisor to the department because of the salary issue.

Mark Stutrud: I would agree. The turnover rate is much higher. In areas of the state where there isn't a strong social work university or a desirable place to live there is a lot of difficulty.

Rep. Edly-Allen: What do we do moving forward? How do we address that turnover rate? That's why were here, right?

Mark Stutrud: Deb, doesn't ICOY have a higher turnover rate? Is that a number we can use?

Deb McCarrel: I believe we are a round 42%. The department and the sector are going to have to think entirely different about the way they staff and service these kids. And whether or not we can invest in certification programs for paraprofessionals and apply the team approach – and now you're going to have less kids graduating and less kids coming into the system because of what's happening with COVID-19. We need to discuss how we staff and provide support the kids and families in the system.

Denice Murray: I had a conversation last night with an administrator at the department. The number does sound underreported. I think we need to move forward with the information provided by Deb McCarrel. We should build upon what is currently there – even if it 40% that's why too high and it is likely higher than that.

Sen. Morrison: Deb, your recommendation of adding another paraprofessional with a cert—

Deb McCarrel: Yeah we were having another conversation about how we address this problem. It's DCFS that's sitting at 60% too. It's nationwide. We need to re-look at what it takes to serve a family. How do we bring more people in and maintain our integrity to do the work?

Sen. Morrison: But that's – If we think there is validity to that that needs to be included as a recommendation and it is not included yet.

Deb McCarrel: Denise and I can tell you we have spent years trying to professionalize the profession. It feels like we have to take step back. I don't know how else to address the problem we have unless we loosen some of the restrictions or provide help to the caseworker so they can be detained. And we have to address the pay rate disparity.

Denise Murray: I think Deb is right on the money. There are some technics that have been willfully underutilized. Let's take psychological first aid for example – where you can train people in the community to identify initial signs of trauma and to begin to direct those individuals to where they can get services and support. If we're looking at trying to utilize what is currently there and expand upon that in capacities where they're not necessarily at the highest rung at the professional ladder. Then we need to start looking at some of these other models that we can implement relatively quickly and are not super expensive to infuse into this work.

Betsy Goulet: We've got to look at ways to get them into the field sooner. Deb, we looked at how to use the CAST certificate as one year towards the required experience in the field. Two states now – Mississippi and Florida are using the CAST certificate as a way to move student's closer to the workforce. CAST prepares students to recognize what trauma looks like in families. We had this conversation seven years ago and we're having it now.

Chis Boyster: This is Chris Boyster. To your point about getting them in earlier. There is always a lot of conversation in the legislature about advanced placement. Is social work ever a focus in advanced placement studies in high schools? Is that something that we have never had a conversation with ISBE about?

Deb McCarrel: I have never seen that. It doesn't mean that it doesn't exist.

Betsy Goulet: I haven't seen it. Our students are saying repeatedly every semester – “Why aren't we talking about trauma. Why aren't we discussing it?” None of my students were familiar with ACES. That's unbelievable that none of them raised their hand when I asked if they knew about it.

Deb McCarrel: I think that is a great idea. I think health classes would be a great place for that.

Mark Stutrud: We think about the admin mind in the sense that in a parallel someone that gets a degree in accounting might go on to get a CPA, but not go on to get their MBA. How can social work be something that can be a vocational experience so people can move on and grow a career? We have created a disposable position.

Denise Murray: I think we need to look at a multi-prong approach because there is certainly need to look at the CAST program and other available programs that are working with those kids or those young people that were formally on that education track. What

about building strength within those same communities? What about the advocacy centers that the department has been paying hundreds of thousands of dollars into annually? If we can put some trainings into that – like psychological first aid. Three to four years ago we trained about 500 social workers. It doesn't seem to be translating and transferring. If we're going to build support in communities we need to take what's already there and build upon it. Where is the data that says that "this has been a successful venture. We have gotten the kinds of outcomes that we had specified." If we're not accomplishing the outcomes we identified and we keep pouring money into these communities with no change – what are we doing?

Rep. Edly-Allen: I have been jotting down notes of what some of you had said. There are a lot of different paths we're going down. Aren't we trying to do is solve the crisis we have currently, correct? It's the bodies – having people to do these positions. And to Deb's point to having the profession be professional I totally get that with the credentialing of teachers, but to Mark's point about CPA – having levels of people that can do the social work. The other point to ISBE just even having vocabulary – Rep. Villa had a student come into her room. He had read an article about depression and was able to identify that that is what he was struggling with. There are a lot of things we are throwing out here – but I hope we can get back to the focus which is getting people back into the pipeline. I had to use the work loosen, the credential – but just to get people that are already certified into the system.

Deb McCarrel: I think just to put a parenthetical around it we need to explore other casework models for staff. Just like we are doing for the behavioral health world we are trying to develop RSA like workers to help behavioral health staff. We need to look at something similar to that for casework. Denice do you agree? We need to re-look at how we provide the service.

Denice Murray: I do agree, absolutely. The way we are currently providing the service is not addressing the needs, nor is it having a significant impact. To Rep. Edly-Allen's point as this conversation evolved we were less focused on the workforce issues that had been identified by this committee. We need to focus on the work of this committee. As we look at how the work force will be supported or enhanced we need to look at the things that we need to build into that. It is going to have to be a multi prong approach. How long is it going to take to get these students ready? How long until we actually get something done? We need to look six months out to see what we can do to improve the work force scenario. What about long term? What do we do to make sure this is being addressed and assessed to make the necessary modification?

Mark Stutrud: I would go with the team approach. There are certain tiers of functions of foster care that could be re-constructed and distributed amongst a well developed and well thought out team. There's a long list of compliance activities that could be done by someone that does not need to have the clinical training background and four year degree. There is way too much put on the foster care worker. As far as a psychological aid

we cannot just put a Band-Aid on that. It's just too much. We cannot provide enough training and support for someone to go through that experience. We have to change the experience of the foster care worker. We then have to address how to best constitute the team.

Denice Murray: With all due respect the psychological first aid piece is not the central focus. It's one of those things that gets added to the mix that can actually provide some ancillary kinds of supports that heretofore do not exist. It's not meant to replace something else or fill in a gap. It is a highly underutilized resource and it does not appear that much though has been given to despite of the fact that the research, I thought, says that it can be effective in these very traumatized and deprived communities. This is not even a process where you have to be particularly skilled. It just teaches you to recognize the beginnings of trauma. That allows someone to direct somebody to where resources exist. Everyone in the those centers need to be treated in that.

Ann Irving: I just want to break in because I am concerned. We are talking about adding new ideas here. I have two concern to the document as it stands and I have one thing to add to the document. We had agreements that a statement in the study that said that "People left POS agencies for DCFS because it was higher pay and the job was easier." We had agreed that that would be removed. It is on page 25. I just want to reiterate that it was agreed to be removed, but I am seeing it still. I don't think that anyone would say that DCFS child abuse investigator is an easy job.

Sen. Morrison: Where was this said?

Ann Irving: It may have been in committee.

Deb McCarrel: That was an additional comment on the survey. Are we talking out everyone's comments or are we just taking out the ones we don't like?

Ann Irving: It is inaccurate.

Deb McCarrell: If we are going to take one person's opinion, we have to take the whole section out.

Ann Irving: If all of the opinions are going in – great. I'd like to see what all of the opinions were so we can choose which ones go in – or let's put them all in there.

Sen. Morrison: Does anyone from the university have a compilation of those comments?

Meaghan Jorgenson: Is anyone from the university on (the call)? I do not have them in front of me, but I can easily ask Tammy for that. I can recirculate that to the group. Does that sound good?

Sen. Morrison: Yes. Thank you. Let's get those and recirculate them to the group.

Meaghan Jorgenson: Will do.

Sen. Morrison: I want to bring us back a little bit. All of a sudden we have got these great ideas that were not brought up that were not brought into the report.

Ann Irving: If I may – there is also a section I do not recall discussing saying that the two staff recruiters at DCFS is not money well spent. How did that make it into the report?

Sen. Morrison: Those were comments made by the chairmen. Those were my comments and remarks. I think that that stands as a fair question.

Ann Irving: In response to that as DCFS has already pointed out on this call there are vacancies in a number of areas. We have areas of the state where child protective workers have pending of 40-50 cases. It is completely unsustainable. The idea that we would remove resources from recruiting people out of universities – they are going to universities and trying to talk to people about how as a social worker is a good career. I don't know why we would not think that it is important to recruit to universities to this work.

Deb McCarrel: I don't think that that is what she is saying, Ann. I think she is saying that the ethics of the positions themselves. If they are not producing outcomes that they're supposed to produce I think she would like to know that information from the department. And then maybe you would have to look at those positions and train. Senator, is that correct?

Sen. Morrison: Of all of the contacts – there was a number given, but I don't have it – that that these two individual full-time workers made.. The number of the contacts that these workers made the number of recruitments were extremely low. It doesn't seem to be an effective way to recruit.

Ann Irving: I think it needs to be restated then so it is clearly stated. You would say that you would like the program to be revised. The way it reads now is as if having recruiters does not make sense. That is what I am concerned about.

Denice Murray: Senator Morrison, I think your articulation of the problem is right on point. There need to be a reevaluation of the recruitment process.

Sen. Morrison: Are we having job fairs? Are things being posted on bulletin boards? Now we're adding the additional stipend program to recruit from the universities? I disagree that we are being dismissive of recruiting people from the universities. We know we need them, but honestly two full-time workers and this is all we have to show for them? Especially during COVID? I understand it is a tough job, but I don't see the merit.

Ann Irving: The way it is worded now it takes on the whole concept of recruitment – the way that it reads now. I am suggesting it is reworded. When I read how it is written now that is the conclusion I come to. What about – recruitment to the field is very important. Let's look at how we are spending dollars to do it. What can we do that would be more effective?

Sen. Morrison: I think you are being very defensive. That is your right to do that. I will re-look at that language.

Mark Stutrud: I think that the underlying issue here is that we look at that critically. It is an important thing for us to do on the department side. We are looking closely at how we do recruitment. We recently hired a new deputy director over the office of employee services. She has a strong background in recruitment. I think the department really deserves to respond in writing to this concern to this concern to both you and the committee.

Chris Boyster: I am going to interject, if you don't mind. As the lobbyist who really pushed this legislation for two years. What Mark just said is really the real heart, meat and potatoes of why we pushed this legislation. From the POS agency side is that we are in POS life experiencing a turnover. It is why we pushed this taskforce. We are experiencing a huge turnover on the POS side of things. We want to address that turnover that we're talking about. I don't want us to get lost from what our focus should be. The focus is how do we particularly on the POS side address this work force shortage? It took us a long time to get this task force passed. Mark, what you said is the real root of what we wanted to address. Hopefully we can get to that place.

Sen. Morrison: Let's get back into other report with some changes that we will be making or considering. I am going to go back to chapter three. The survey method and the survey results there was a challenge in term of the numbers that were presented regarding vacancy. Some of you feel that the turnover rate is not correctly portrayed. We are going to be looking at some of the individual remarks that were submitted with this survey by employees. Meaghan is going to get that and distribute that to everybody. We are on page 26 – Task Force Recommendations. This is an initiative that Sen. McGuire brought forward – unfortunately he isn't able to be on the call today. Meaghan can you provide an update?

Meaghan Jorgenson: Thank you. I would like to update the group that we have two universities that have executed and signed agreements. I anticipate a third by the end of the week. We are working on a few contact tweaks on that one. This is a step in the right direction.

Sen. Morrison: On bullet point number two on page 26 we talk about with any pilot program that an evidence based statistically accurate review of these stipend

opportunities be documented. I think we need to clearly state who is responsible for this documentation.

Meaghan Jorgenson: I think it will be us.

Sen. Morrison: Okay let's just put that in there. 4.2 Child Welfare Worker Retention – I think this really gets to a lot of what we have been talking about. Several recommendations have been made. Any changes, adjustments, or additions? We talk about paperwork, supervisors being supported and trained, we talk about the office of the inspector general – having those reports actually looked at carefully. The team-based approach to casework is on that we already touched don in several ways. Mark and Denice? Adding a support specialist – someone who has a certificate that may not be a social worker. Am I right?

Deb McCarrel: Yes, we were talking about another model that could be put in place.

Sen. Morrison: Is there enough information in this for someone to pick it up and fully understand it?

Denice Murray: I think we could add additional information regarding the discussion that we had today. Deb we can talk afterwards.

Sen. Morrison: I think that would be very helpful. We talked about salary disparity. Training models. In number seven we're talking about enhancing direct service staff and courts. Does that say enough? I am not sur who suggested it. I think there is merit in that, but in two years will someone that wasn't involved in this organization be able to pick this up and understand?

Deb McCarrel: We can beef this up to better explain it.

Mark Stutrud: I can add to the team-based language as well.

Sen. Morrison: Recommendation 8 is the protection and well-being of staff. By adding to the team that should act as a mental health support. Denice, do you want to add into that the psychological trauma that you were talking about?

Denise Murray: Yes.

Sen. Morrison: Number nine – the data collection process that that evaluates the impact of child welfare related work on staff.

Denise Murray: We need to discuss what that looks like.

Deb McCarrel: That should have the term administrative burden in there too. We can add that.

Mark Stutrud: So the only other contracts we haven't mentioned in the report is the pandemic. What we have is the remote work phenomenon that are still going on and will go on for a long while, probably. Do we want to make any mention of this? I

Deb McCarrel: Could this be added to the survey?

Mark Stutrud: Sure.

Deb McCarrel: Do you want to take a crack of adding some language that we could give the university to add to that piece?

Mark Stutrud: Sure. Particularly remote work, virtual onboarding, and the engagement of staff – which has changed dramatically.

Deb McCarrel: Senator – is that okay? I hear what he is saying, but I don't know where to put it.

Sen. Morrison: I think it is important to include it. When we look at planning ahead – by the time we get to decision makers we are looking at next spring at the earliest. Administratively DCFS can pick this up and make changes. If we're looking at legislative changes I am hoping that by then the issue of COVID is at bay. Let's move on to Racial Equity. Denice a lot of this work was done in your subcommittee. Is there anything you would like to talk about.

Denice Murray: We have some suggestions that have been included. There are some regions that have greater racial disparity than others. That's not news. There have been some policies that contributed to the continuation of racial disparity within the department. I think the data speaks for itself in the report.

Sen. Morrison: Since the Black Caucus has developed their four pillars. One of their pillars is public health and human services. I have talked with Leader Hunter about having a separate hearing, probably in November, the issue of racial equity in DCFS. Would you be willing to actually come to the committee and make a brief report about some of the things that you have noticed?

Denice Murray: Yes.

Sen. Morrison: Thank you. I wanted to ask before volunteering you. Any questions on racial equity? Okay. Any other comments?

Sen Wilcox: I was very happy with the way my subcommittees section was worded.

IV. Next Meeting Dates

Sen. Morrison: Meaghan when is this report due? Nov. 1?

Meaghan Jorgenson: January 1, 2021. Just to outline for you our next meeting is scheduled for November 4. The meeting after that is scheduled for November 18, which could end up being in the middle of Veto. And we have another two weeks after that.

Sen. Morrison: I want to make sure everyone has time with their re-writes and has time to review everything. Can we do Monday November 16th at 10am?

Meaghan Jorgenson: We can do that.

Sen. Morrison: Let's set our next meeting for November 16, 2020 beginning at 10:00am.

Meaghan Jorgenson: If everyone could send their additions and comments to myself, I will get that information to the universities to keep it consistent. That would be very helpful. Thank you.

V. Public Comment

Sen. Morrison: Do we have any comments from the public?

VI. Adjournment

Meeting is adjourned.