Health & Human Services Oversight Committee

Foster Care Subcommittee Report

May 11, 2018

The Subcommittee meets monthly to work with foster parents, DCYF and numerous other stakeholders gathering information on how to best support this entire system of care for children and families.

Presenters:

- Foster Parents
- Former Foster Children
- Child Advocate, Moira O'Neill
- DCYF Director, Joseph Ribsam, Jr.
- DCYF – Kathleen Companion, Foster Care Manager
- DHHS, John Williams, Esq.
- Legislators
- NH FAPA (NH Foster & Adoptive Parent Association)
- The Alliance – Fostering Change NH
- NH Fire Marshall's Office and Firefighters

Identified Concerns:

- Should there be a Foster Parent Bill of Rights?
- No interaction between Foster Parent Associations and DCYF
- Foster Parents feelings around:
  - Lack of Respect
  - Not part of the team
  - Not being given enough information about case timelines, the laws, the court system.
  - When foster children need to see a physician or mental health professional – forms are not signed by the biological parent for permission and children must wait needlessly for treatment.
  - Not being provided with all the necessary documentation concerning the roles and expectations for foster parents.
- Former Foster Children Concerns:
  - Exiting the system with no place to go.

- In one case a young adult left the system with no birth certificate or social security card which left them with no way to prove their identity.
- Lack of information on how to access DCYF for assistance in finding a job, home and obtaining food stamps.
- No prescriptions for medications

❖ DCYF Concerns:

- No meaningful dialogue sessions between the Division and the Foster Parent Associations.
- Lack of staff to provide needed assistance to the foster families
- Recruitment and Retention of Foster Parents. Not enough foster families.
- Low foster care rates.
- Voluntary services were eliminated and no way to reach out and assist biological families pro-actively and offer preventative services.

❖ Fire Marshall's Office Concerns:

- Fire Inspection Checklist for Foster Homes
  - Outdated form
  - Individual towns/cities utilizing subjective reasoning when reading and following the fire inspection form. No consistency.

Measurable Outcomes:

- Foster Parent Associations and DCYF Director meet monthly.
- New DCYF Director looking at all facets of the Agency, creating new protocols and forming Transformational Teams to address all related issues, concerns and expanding upon what is working well.
- DCYF is insuring that all pertinent documentation is being provided to foster families at the initial training sessions and making them available online.
- The Foster Care Subcommittee worked with John Williams, Esq. and Byry Kennedy, Esq, from DHHS to craft an Amendment that would allow the Courts to intervene and grant DCYF the authority to have children seen in a timely manner for mental health and physical health exams which also assisted Early Supports and Services the ability to see children quickly and begin treatment sooner rather than later.

- Senator John Reagan brought the Amendment forward through HB 590 which passed in the Senate and then was brought forward to House Finance and was included in HB 592 which passed both the House and the Senate.
- Foster parents saw immediate response to a very real need that they identified and DHHS, DCYF and the Legislature supported and rectified.
- HB 592 addresses the need for more staff at DCYF, 17 new Case Workers, 2 Supervisors, and 2 Clerical positions were added as well as a small increase for foster care rates, voluntary services were added back also as well as resource workers to help with recruitment and retention of foster parents.
- DCYF Director Joseph Ribsam, Jr. and DCYF Foster Care Manager Kathleen Companion have both reached out and worked with the issues presented by the former foster children. All documentation has been re-created and supplied and assistance with housing and other issues have been addressed also.
- Community College applications have been delivered for two former foster children by their former foster parent to the appropriate personnel for processing.
- The Fire Marshall's Office and the DCYF Director and Foster Care Manager met and have reviewed and updated the Fire Inspection form so that it will be uniformly and consistently followed by all the towns and cities.

On June 11th, 2018 the Joint Legislative Committee to Examine the Independent Review of DCYF and the HHS Oversight Foster Care Subcommittee will have a combined meeting along with Judge Kelly and Kristy Lamont from the Judiciary, Moira O'Neill, Child Advocate, Anne Edwards of the AG's Office, John Williams, DHHS, Joe Ribsam, Jr, DCYF Director, Kathleen Companion, DCYF Foster Care Manager, Nancy Rollins, Easter Seals, NH FAPA, The Alliance, Foster Parents and Former Foster Children to discuss the Court Protocols and procedures and the roles of each within the foster care process. The Chair of the Committee will also reach out to CASA to request their attendance as well.

The Subcommittee continues to make progress and continues to hear from foster parents about how grateful they are for this subcommittee and all the opportunities it has afforded them.

Respectfully Submitted,

Representative Mariellen MacKay, Chair