

2001 Georgia Children's Agenda Item Summary

Issue area: Safety

Agenda Item: Child Protective Services

Lead Organization: Barton Child Law & Policy Clinic at Emory University

Agenda Item:

Strengthen Georgia's Child Protective Services' Capacity to protect children from abuse and neglect.

Brief Explanation of Item:

The Child Protective Services Task Force appointed by Governor Barnes has recommended strategies that should be immediately undertaken to strengthen Georgia's Child Protective Service system. In 1999, almost 70,000 reports of child abuse and neglect were filed in Georgia. The Task Force found that the workers who investigate these reports are inadequately compensated and do not have the resources essential to successful outcomes. The turnover rate among workers is 44% statewide and considerably higher in some metropolitan areas. Consequently, Georgia's effectiveness in protecting its children has been seriously compromised. The Georgia General Assembly must fully implement the recommendations of the Task Force by appropriating sufficient funding to:

- 1) increase worker salary levels to recruit and retain qualified staff and fill all vacancies;
- 2) lower workers' caseloads and reduce turnover by hiring additional staff;
- 3) create a statewide confidential information system to monitor children alleged to have been abused or neglected;
- 4) provide workers with appropriate resources, including legal representation and placement options.

Why the item is Important:

The Division of Family and Children Services is the state agency charged with protecting abused and neglected children from further harm. Child Protective Services (CPS) is the front line of defense for child victims. CPS workers decide whether and how to intervene when an allegation is made about child abuse. These decisions mean the difference between life and death for some children. Once an allegation is substantiated, the decisions of CPS and placement workers determine whether a child is protected and nurtured or further victimized by the perpetrator and the state system.

The turnover rate among workers making these life and death decisions in FY00 was 44%. With so many vacancies in these critical positions, children are not adequately protected. Until there are enough people and enough tools to appropriately protect children, abused and neglected children in Georgia will continue to be further victimized by the state.

The Facts:

- The statewide turnover rate among DFCS workers in FY00 was 44%, and as high as 70-100% in some counties.
- In order to comply with Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) caseload standards of approximately 15 cases per worker, DFCS needs to add 588 social services case management staff. Adding 588 staff members will bring Georgia into compliance with the CWLA standards only if the number of cases remains constant and the turnover rate is reduced to 10%. DFCS has requested funding to add 196 workers each year for three years to meet this goal.

- DFCS had approximately 1500 positions allocated to investigate the approximately 48,000 cases of abuse and neglect in FY00 and manage the cases of more than 20,000 children who spent time in foster care in FY00. A turnover rate of 44% means that there were approximately 660 vacancies during the year.
- Social Services Case Manger Associates (the entry level position for DFCS workers) currently start at a salary of \$22,044.00 and Social Services Case Mangers (caseworkers with a Master's degree or some related experience) currently start at a salary of \$26,646.
- A user-friendly integrated statewide information system to track children who have been the subject of abuse or neglect allegations does not exist in the state of Georgia. The status of this system is unknown.
- In Georgia there are 100 Special Assistant Attorneys General (SAAGs) to handle all the juvenile court proceedings for abused and neglected children and they are paid less than SAAGs representing any other state agency. About half of these positions turned over in 2000.
- SAAGs representing the Department of Transportation earn approximately \$100.00 per hour. SAAGs representing DFCS caseworkers earn \$45.00 per hour, the salary established in 1990.
- Georgia pays foster parents \$12.00 per day (\$360/month) to house, feed, clothe, and nurture abused and neglected children removed from their homes.
- Georgia provides a one-time clothing allowance of \$100.00 for children entering foster care and an annual clothing allowance of \$100-\$300 for school-aged children. This amount must cover school clothes, play clothes, band uniforms, prom dresses, etc.
- DFCS caseworkers sometimes sleep in their offices with children because foster homes cannot be found for the children.

Key Action Steps:

Lawmakers should, at a minimum, approve the DHR budget requests related to:

- salaries for DFCS workers
- salaries for SAAGs
- reducing caseloads by increasing the number of DFCS caseworker positions
- fully funding the MATCH program to provide appropriate placements for children
- increasing funding and services to foster parents and other placement resources
- developing a statewide information system to track children.

DHR and DFCS should:

- Develop a functional, user-friendly statewide information system as quickly as possible.
- Advocate for front-line workers to receive the tools and support they need to successfully protect children.

Supporters should:

- Make your voice heard with the Governor, lawmakers, and DHR and DFCS.
- Add your signature to the letter to the Governor located at <http://www.childwelfare.net>.
- Call and write your legislators about these issues.
- Host forums in your community to raise awareness about these issues.
- Become knowledgeable about volunteer opportunities.
- Sign up for the CPS listserv at <http://www.childwelfare.net> to receive ongoing information about these issues.

Contact:

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