



Child Safety in Substitute Care Independent Review

External Advisory Committee Charter

Background:

Children are the heart of our communities and the future of our state. Oregon is deeply committed to each child's right to safety, stability, and well-being. This commitment is most important in our child welfare system. The Department of Human Services, directly tasked with caring for children who cannot remain safely in their homes, must safeguard these rights for the children in out-of-home care. The substitute care system includes three distinct entities.

These entities include:

- Child Welfare- that serves as the legal guardian to children in substitute care, determines eligibility of children for foster care assistance payments, disburses foster care assistance payments to licensed providers, supports licensed providers, provides services to children in care, and responds to safety complaints about foster care providers;
- Licensing- that provides licenses to applicable individuals and entities, including private child-caring agencies, certified provider homes, and approved parent providers, according to applicable law; and
- Oregon Adult Abuse Prevention and Investigation (OAAPI)- that screens and investigates possible abuse issues that arise with Licensed Residential Treatment Providers.

The complexity of these systems, current agency culture and practice, and the difficulty of communication between these three entities has led to serious concerns about the safety of child in out-of-home care. The system requires a critical review and assessment to facilitate changes and improvements critical to the care and safety of children in Oregon. To be successful, this review must include youth and the community partners that work hand-in-hand with DHS to provide child welfare services.

Independent Review:

DHS will secure a Contractor with proven and relevant experience to conduct an in-depth review and assessment of Oregon's substitute care system and to provide DHS with recommendations to facilitate and support improvements necessary to ensure the care and safety of children served in the out-of-home care system. This contractor will bring an independent perspective to a complex system of services specifically pertaining to Licensed Providers. The Independent Reviewer will assess the following components of the Oregon substitute care system:

- Adequacy of DHS oversight, public oversight, and licensing applicable to individuals and entities, including private child-caring agencies, certified provider homes, and approved parent providers, seeking or obtaining a license according to applicable law to provide child-caring services
- Cultural responsiveness
- Abuse and neglect screenings and investigations of Licensed Providers



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- Financial stability and sufficiency of Licensed Providers
- Communications and accountability mechanisms within DHS

The review must assess each of the entities responsible for the Child Welfare out-of-home care system, including the processes for licensing, for screening and investigating abuse, for disbursing foster care assistance payments, and for monitoring the financial solvency of care providers. It should consider business practices, communication structures, agency culture, and practices across and among each of these departments. The initial timeline for this review is up to six (6) months. However, implementation of improvements can begin immediately.

Purpose:

Governor Kate Brown established the external advisory committee for the child safety in substitute care independent review. The advisory committee will guide the independent review process by providing advice, feedback, and consultation to interim DHS Director Clyde Saiki, the project manager, and the independent reviewer. The external advisory committee was created to include the perspectives of legislators, the Governor's Office, and community stakeholders in the independent review process. The committee will provide feedback on the review process, issues directly related to child safety in substitute care, and communication strategies. It will also provide consultation on which recommendations are immediately actionable as well as implementation strategies for long-term recommendations.

Scope:

The external advisory committee has been created to act as an expert sounding board and provide the independent reviewer with a community perspective. Members of the committee are appointed to share their expertise and community knowledge on the issues facing child safety in substitute care throughout the independent review process. The scope of the external advisory committee's input includes:

- Cultural competence and responsiveness in the system;
- Disproportionality in the system;
- Appropriateness of placement settings and length of stay;
- The interplay of Federal Laws with child safety concerns;
- Foster care recruitment, retention, and supportive services;
- Work force development, training, accountability, and quality assurance;
- Abuse and neglect screenings and investigations of Licensed Providers;
- Licensing authority, policies, practices, regulations, and available tools;
- Communications mechanisms within and across DHS;
- Accountability mechanisms within the DHS structure;



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- Determination of and ongoing monitoring of financial stability and sufficiency of Licensed Providers;
- Best practices in other states for out-of-home care systems;
- Confidentiality and best practices for managing public oversight;
- Coordination between Oregon Child Welfare and the Oregon Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities programs; and
- Reflecting on case studies of licensed provider(s) selected by DHS to include incidents, lessons learned, and actionable recommendations for best practices.

To ensure that action can be taken to address the systems most critical concerns, the scope of this advisory committee and the corresponding independent review must remain manageable. The scope of this advisory committee and the corresponding independent review is meant as a starting point for larger DHS systems change. The actions taken and lessons learned from this process are to serve as a model to other areas of child welfare practice. It is our expectation that this starting point will later fuse into broad implications for child safety system-wide.

Membership

Committee membership includes representation from a variety of key stakeholders including: the Oregon Legislature, substitute care providers, child welfare professionals, community leaders, national experts, and alumni of the foster care system.

Meetings

The committee meetings are chaired by the interim DHS Director Clyde Saiki and staffed by the project manager and Governor's Office staff. The meeting frequency and agendas will be set by the Chair and distributed in advance from the DHS Director's Office.

Participation

Participants are encouraged to attend the meetings in person, but opportunities to call-in to these meetings can be arranged with the project manager.

This Charter Approved by the Committee Members on January 11, 2016

Amendments and Updates	
Date	Changes and Notes:
1.29.2016	Better aligning the scope of the committee with the independent review components.