

MARYLAND CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES REVIEW PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT PLAN 2nd QUARTERLY REPORT

NARRATIVE

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Maryland Department of Human Resources has completed the second quarter of the implementation of its Program Improvement Plan (PIP). The PIP was developed to address the lack of practice consistencies, information system requirements and capabilities, qualitative measures and tools, and access to services identified in the Child and Family Services Review (CFSR). The action items and benchmarks under the five priority areas identified in the PIP - Comprehensive Assessment, Legal and Court Practices, Quality Assurance, Service Access, and MD CHESSIE (Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System) move Maryland closer to the standards set in the CFSR. As part of the PIP implementation strategy, Maryland developed five committees, one to address each priority area, to execute the PIP.

During the second quarter Maryland created a PIP Steering Committee. The Committee is charged with overseeing and guiding the implementation of the PIP. Most importantly this committee provides the necessary linkages through the State and works to eliminate barriers to implementation. The committee is co-chaired by the Executive Director of the Social Services Administration and the chair of the Maryland Association of Social Service Departments. Members of the committee include the co-chairs of the five PIP committees (5 local directors and 5 state directors/managers), the Chief Performance Officer, two local assistant directors of social services, two additional state directors/managers as well as representatives from Baltimore City Department of Social Services (2), the Office of the Deputy Secretaries (2), the Foster Care Court Improvement Project (FCCIP) (1), and University of Maryland School of Social Work Training Department (1).

As reported in the first quarter report, Maryland has revised its Quality Assurance system that integrates three stages/levels of assessing and improving child welfare practice both on the frontline and system wide. During this quarter a review instrument was developed and distributed to local and state representatives for review and comment. The instrument offers an intensive review of Maryland's child welfare compliance requirements, incorporating review questions, exploratory guidance, and policy citations.

In Maryland's continuous efforts to improve its safety and permanency outcomes, a policy workgroup was developed to review and update policies to improve practice and provide consistency throughout the state; staff was trained on using the SAFE-CGRP safety assessment for children in group care; and in Baltimore City, staff received refresher training on concurrent planning. The PIP committee co-chairs attended the 8th annual CANDO (Child Abuse and Neglect Dependency Options) Conference at which the best practice and permanency planning training was conducted.

Maryland is excited that early release module of its Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System, MD CHESSIE is operating in 21 of its 24 local departments of

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social services. The system will improve Maryland's ability track and monitor performance outcomes based on data.

COMMITTEE PROGRESS

Comprehensive Assessment

The comprehensive assessment team is charged with developing strategies to improve Maryland's case assessment and service delivery practices. This will involve developing and implementing a comprehensive, family-center, neighborhood-based assessment and case planning process as well as strategies for and working with the local departments of social services to implement the Family-to-Family model. The team will also examine policy and practice on other components of service delivery and recommend and implement changes.

During the 2nd quarter the committee sub-divided into three workgroups – policy, assessment and training to accomplish the assigned tasks. As a result the assessment workgroup will develop the comprehensive practice model, the policy workgroup will review and update all policies to improve practice and provide consistency throughout the state, and the training workgroup will identify training needs and develop the necessary resources.

Efforts are also being made to design and implement a Family Center Neighborhood Based practice model. Maryland continues its conversation with the Annie E. Casey Foundation regarding assistance in the implementation of the Family-to-Family model. To date a decision has not been made by the foundation regarding funding Maryland's efforts. As a contingency, the committee has begun to research and discuss other models that would be applicable for Maryland.

In Maryland's continuous efforts to improve its safety and permanency outcomes, 67% of county and 6% of Baltimore City child welfare staff received training on the SAFEC-GRP safety assessment staff and in Baltimore City, over 700 staff received refresher training on concurrent planning.

Court Practices

The Legal and Court Practice Committee is charged with collaborating with the Foster Care Court Improvement Project (FCCIP) to improve court practices that have a significant impact of service delivery such as ASFA exceptions, concurrent planning, Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement (APPLA), Child In Need of Assistance (CINA) and Termination of Parental Rights (TPR). The FCCIP has worked to improve the court processes indicated in the final report by incorporating areas into existing subcommittees and subsequently establishing a Best Practices subcommittee. The committees include Judges, Masters, a representative from the Citizen's Review Board, staff from the Social Services Administration as well as children's and parent's attorneys and FCCIP staff.

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During this quarter a draft of a Best Practices Manual regarding permanency for CINA cases was drafted and distributed. The committee has worked on the revision of the Uniform Court Orders to address ASFA which should be completed by October 21, 2005. All Equity Court case files dating back to 1983 are being reviewed and assessed to determine whether they were juvenile matters that needed review hearings.

Maryland continued to improve its relationship with the judiciary and attorneys. The Executive Director of the Social Services Administration met with the Chief Judge regarding court practices as it relates to permanency issues. Presentations were also made at National Judicial Leadership Summit and the 8th annual CANDO (Child Abuse and Neglect Dependency Options) Conference. Local Judges were given the permanency trend data for their jurisdictions and encouraged to meet regularly with the local directors to discuss the trends.

Quality Assurance

The Quality Assurance (QA) committee was charged with designing a QA system that evaluates the quality of services and measures the outcomes for the children and families receiving services in Maryland. The QA committee began working on the redesign of the system soon after the approval of the PIP. The larger committee was subdivided into three work groups chaired by and included members of the larger committee but also allowed further participation from agency staff. The participants included community partners, the Citizens Review Board, local and central staff.

During the second quarter of Maryland's Program Improvement Plan, Quality Assurance activities have focused on, 1) finalizing and distributing the review instrument for use at the supervisory, peer, and stakeholder levels, as well as for review of Maryland's L.J. consent decree requirements, 2) ongoing consultation and technical assistance from Peter Watson, Director, National Child Welfare Resource Center for Organizational Improvement, 3) conducting CFSR training for case review team members, and 4) initiating planning for the three pilot/test site reviews.

In August 2005, the QA sub-committee charged with developing an instrument for supervisory, peer, and stakeholder level review, distributed an extensive document for broader review and comment. The instrument offers an intensive review of Maryland's child welfare compliance requirements, incorporating review questions, exploratory guidance, and policy citations (Code of Maryland Regulations, United States Code, Code of Federal Regulations). Based on comments received from the review of the instrument, modifications will be made. Planning for testing the instrument will begin in quarter three of the PIP.

Throughout the month of September 2005, several discussions with Peter Watson occurred regarding how best to assess for outcomes for children and families served by Maryland's child welfare system. While the instrument developed through the QA committee adequately addresses child welfare compliance requirements, it does not

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encompass sufficient elements to evaluate the quality of services provided and measure child welfare outcomes achieved (safety, permanence, well-being). The federal CFSR instrument is used, with minor modification, by most other states to measure these child welfare outcomes. A major advantage to the use of this instrument is that it has been tested with over 2500 case record reviews covering all 50 states and territories to determine the level of quality and measure outcomes for children and families. Through consultation with Peter Watson, it was agreed that Maryland would move forward using the CFSR instrument to conduct on-site reviews at three test sites. The three local departments that volunteered for the initial on-site reviews are Baltimore, Howard, and Worcester counties.

Prior to conducting on-site reviews, it was necessary to train and establish a core group of case review team members for the initial site reviews. On October 14, 2005, Peter Watson conducted CFSR training for thirty-seven (37) participants representing state and local department staff, and stakeholders from Maryland's Citizens Review Board. Local departments represented included staff from the test site jurisdictions as well as other local department staff. Additionally, a representative from the University of Maryland School of Social Work attended the training.

Using guidelines provided by the National Resource Center, planning to conduct on-site reviews is currently underway. Upfront preparation and sufficient lead-time at the state and local level is critical to the success of the on-site review. It is anticipated that one review per month will be scheduled for the initial three sites to be completed within quarter three.

Services Access

The Services Access committee was charged with developing and implementing strategies to increase the availability of and access to critical services that are vital to successful outcomes for the children in the care of Maryland's child welfare system. This committee will assess the services available in the State of Maryland and collaborate with state and community partners to increase the availability of and access to critical services.

During the 2nd quarter, committee representatives hosted a series of focus groups to gain a more in-depth perspective on the access issues (mental health, education, etc) for the children and families in the child welfare system. The issues discussed included funding, systemic barriers, quality of services, and geographic access (statewide vs. local). The focus groups included representatives from all 24 local departments. In addition, the committee met with a representative group of stakeholders external to our organization (service providers, advocates, etc) to gain a fuller understanding of the challenges they see for our children and families in securing necessary services. This has allowed us to clarify the true nature of the access issues for the children and families we serve in the child welfare system. The result is a series of recommended actions in each of the services access areas which will be sent to our PIP Steering Committee for approval at our November 1, 2005 meeting.

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A major effort to implement the new foster care recruitment plan is underway. DHR is in the process of developing public relations materials are under development and strategies to move recruitment to the local department level will be finalized implemented in the 3rd quarter. The cornerstone of the plan will be implementation of the community based **family to family** model. Also we began implementing a series of foster parent support (retention) services including a new policy that provides for respite care for our foster and relative providers.

MD CHESSIE

The MD CHESSIE committee works in conjunction with the The MD CHESSIE Project, an initiative of DHR that began in 1997, to provide Social Services workers with a comprehensive information system that will enhance their ability to meet current and projected operational requirements and improve the delivery of child welfare services to children and families.

During this quarter, the implementation of the Early Release of the Referral Module continued. Currently, 21 Local Departments have started the live data entry. Two of the remaining counties will go live during the week of November 14, 2005. The remaining county is scheduled to go live before the end of December 2005.

The MD CHESSIE Full Release Rollout Schedule has been modified to now be a three phase rollout. The Pilot County, Harford, (Phase 1) is scheduled for February 2006. Phase 2 is scheduled for June 2006 and includes 21 counties. Phase 3 is scheduled for October 2006 and includes Baltimore County and Baltimore City.