

# Joint Legislative Oversight Committee on Health and Human Services

April 17, 2014

## Child Protective Services Options for Consideration

The Child Protective Services (CPS) program helps prevent further harm to children from abuse, exploitation or neglect by a parent or caretaker. There are three phases to CPS: Intake, Assessments and In-Home Services. Social workers at the county DSS receive reports of alleged abuse or neglect, determine whether the allegations meet the legal definitions (CPS Intake), and if so, initiate a CPS Assessment. If the family needs services, CPS provides them (CPS In-Home Services) until the conditions that led to the maltreatment are resolved. When the safety of the child cannot be assured, DSS takes the child into legal custody.

The number of Child Protective Services investigations in North Carolina has grown from 111,720 in fiscal year 2002 to 134,126 in fiscal year 2012, an increase of 20%. *Increases in Child Protective Services caseload sizes impacts how quickly a county can react to reports of abuse, neglect and dependency.*

The average time (number of hours) from receiving a report of alleged abuse, neglect or dependency and beginning an investigation has been trending up over the last few years:

North Carolina	2008	2009	2010	2011
Mean	44.6	46.8	41.7	48.8

While only a small number of investigations lead to removal from the home, the longer it takes to begin an investigation the longer a child may be in an abusive or neglectful situation.

North Carolina Division of Social Services policy recommends that the average CPS caseloads be no greater than 10 families at any time for workers performing CPS assessments.

In calendar year 2011, there were 43 counties who exceed the recommended caseload size. Of these 43 counties, 21 counties had average caseload sizes of 15 or greater, and of these 15 counties, 9 had average caseload sizes of 20 or greater. The highest average caseload size was 30.75.

Child Protective Services is funded by federal, state, and county funds. Federal funds are comprised of the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grant, Title IV-E, and Social Services Block Grant (SSBG) funds.

Local county departments of social services have lost a significant amount of federal funding for child protective services. Counties have lost over \$23 million in federal funding in fiscal year 2013-14. This loss includes \$4.5 million in TANF block grant funding for protective services workers in local county department of social services, \$3.8 million of

TANF county block grant funds (\$6.8 million was reduced from the county block grant, counties spend approximately 60% of their county block grant funds on Child Protective Services), and \$14.6 million in Title IV-E funding. The Governor requested and the legislature approved \$4.8 million in non-recurring state funding for county departments of social services. With these added non-recurring funds the net loss of federal funding was \$18.1 million.

### **Options for Consideration to Improve Child Protective Services**

- **Provide Funding:** Identify funding to provide adequate resources for local county departments of social services to provide Child Protective Services to protect abused, neglected and dependent children and youth.
- **Reduce Caseloads:** Provide \$3.8 million in funding for 72 county CPS workers in order to reduce CPS assessment caseloads to an average of 10 cases per worker.
- **Statewide Evaluation:** Provide \$700,000 in funding for a statewide evaluation, to include recommendations, of child protective services performance, caseload sizes, administrative structure, funding and worker turnover.
- **Child Protective Services Pilot:** Provide \$300,000 to fund the development and implementation of a pilot program designed to enhance coordination of services and information among local county dss agencies and local law enforcement, court system, Guardian Ad Litem programs and other agencies as determined appropriate by the Department of Health and Human Services.
- **Enhance Child Welfare Oversight:** Provide \$250,000 in funding for 3 Child Welfare field staff to improve oversight, monitoring and training of local county departments of social services. This restores the total number of field staff for the Division of Social Services Child Welfare Services to 10.