



STATE OF HAWAII
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES
810 Richards Street, Suite 400
Honolulu, Hawaii 96813

June 6, 2007

Mr. Butch Gima
Maui Citizen Review Panel
P.O.Box 630400
Lanai City, Hawaii 96763-0400

Dear Mr. Gima:

Thank you for the Maui Citizen Review Panel's (CRP) 2005 and 2006 Annual Reports and recommendations to improve Child Welfare Services (CWS). We appreciate the Panel's work and apologize for our oversight and long delay in sending our replies.

Your 2006 Report indicated that the Panel was not provided outcomes data for comparison and analysis. The outcomes data reports are available in the DHS internal database on a quarterly basis. We will ensure that the Panel be provided with outcomes data by Maui CWS representative.

The CRP's 2005 and 2006 combined recommendations and the Department's response (in italics) are as follows:

1. Foster Care System --

It is recommended that DHS, as part of the PIP and CQI process, expand its foster care quality control/feedback system that results in the following:

- a. Increased communication between social workers and foster parents,
- b. Decreased placement difficulties,
- c. Increased coordination of mental health referrals,
- d. Improved transitioning of foster youth "ageing (sic) out" of the foster care system,
- e. An annual survey of active foster parents regarding levels of satisfaction, suggestions and complaints.

We have been supporting and promoting increased communication between CWS social workers and foster parents. As part of the PIP, monthly visits by the social worker with the child, foster parents and parents are required to enhance communication with foster parents and to address placement difficulties.

Quality Case Reviews (QCR), which mirrors the Federal Child and Family Services Review, are conducted annually on all islands to measure safety, permanence and well-being outcomes for children and to assess DHS performance. The QCR process is part of the Department's continuous quality improvement (CQI) program and consists of case record reviews as well as interviews with CWS worker and/or supervisor, the child (as appropriate), foster parents and parents by internal CWS social workers and external community reviewers. For example, placement stability, services to the child and foster families, and meeting the child's mental health needs are some key indicators reviewed by the QCR reviewers.

Also, the Statewide CQI Council, with Maui CRP representation, has reviewed data regarding placement stability in May 2006. Some of the Council's suggestions, which coincided with the Department's action steps, were to maximize Child and Adolescents Mental Health Division's (CAMHD) services, to consolidate existing resource list, to pair a youth with a mentor from the Coalition, and to conduct ongoing screening of foster parents who have requested a child's removal to help better understand the issues and to identify training/support.

In 2007, the Department has integrated the training and support of resource families (foster parents) into a seamless process for both child specific and general licensed families to access services, support and training through "Hui Hoomalu" – a partnership of community agencies which includes Partners In Development Foundation, Catholic Charities of Hawaii, Foster Families Program of Hawaii (FFPH) and Kokua Ohana, with a strong focus to recruit Hawaiian and Part-Hawaiian resource families as over 50% of our foster children are Hawaiian and Part-Hawaiian. FFPH has established a warm line for resource families.

The Department, in collaboration with CAMHD, has successfully achieved the following outcomes to ensure appropriate and timely mental health services for eligible children:

- Streamlined the referral process between CWS and CAMHD and trained CWS staff how to properly refer children for evaluation and services.*
- CAMHD trained and certified CWS staff to administer the Child and Adolescent Functioning Assessment Scale, which is a requirement for determining children with social, emotional and behavioral difficulties (SEBD), to expedite the referral process.*
- Strengthened coordination between CWS and CAMHD by having joint meetings and joint trainings.*
- CAMHD has accepted CWS children for emergency placement into therapeutic foster homes, pending SEBD determinations.*
- CWS Section Administrators and CAMHD Family Guidance Center Branch Chiefs meet quarterly and on an as needed basis to discuss children for whom there are difficulties in completing an SEBD determination or providing services.*
- CAMHD staff have participated in our QCR as peer reviewers to strengthen the CWS CQI program*

These joint CWS/CAMHD efforts have increased the number of CWS children determined eligible for and receiving mental health services. During Hawaii's PIP, the percentage of CWS children referred by CWS units increased by 15.67% in FY 2006 and the average number of days from date of SEBD referral to date CAMHD services were initiated decreased from an average of 43.5 days to 12.4 days.

DHS continues to collaborate with community partners and the Hawaii Foster Youth Coalition to enhance and to promote transition services for our exiting foster youth. The listing of transition services (which include Independent Living skills, higher education board allowance, Med-QUEST coverage) is posted on the DHS Website. The Coalition members also serve as mentors for our youth.

In addition, Youth Circle to engage youth and family members through EPIC Ohana is another important resource for our youth. The purpose of the Youth Circle is to reduce homelessness and to connect youth to their circle of support.

In the 2007 Legislature, DHS proposed legislation to expand higher education benefits to youth by including youth who have been adopted and increasing the age limit and application timeframe. We believe that post-secondary education and/or vocational training will provide more opportunities for our young people to achieve self-sufficiency. Although the proposed legislation received overwhelming support from the youth, the Coalition, community stakeholders and the Senate and House Committees on Human Services, the bill failed to pass on the last evening of the 2007 Session. We intend to resubmit the bill next session.

More importantly, DHS is committed to finding "families for life" and connections for foster youth through our partnership with Family Court, the Coalition, Heart Gallery Hawaii, the Hui, EPIC Ohana and the youth themselves. It is simply not enough just to give our youth a package of benefits when they exit foster care, no matter how great the benefits are, our youth need enduring and permanent family connections.

In 2006, we have developed a "Questionnaire for Exiting Foster Parents" with input from staff and community stakeholders to help guide the line units and DHS in making improvements to prevent multiple placements and to validate effective CWS practices and efforts. Each CWS Section's Licensing staff mailed out the questionnaire and compiled the feedback for ongoing improvements. In partnership with the Hui, DHS plans to implement an annual questionnaire for both active and exiting foster parents for ongoing feedback. We believe the feedback will help DHS improve communication and collaboration with foster parents.

2. Adoptions

It is recommended that the DHS define the criteria for foster children to be adopted.

- a. *The results of DHS' participation in AdoptUsKids, HOPE Inc., Hawaii Family Forum and Heart Gallery shall be documented and evaluated annually.*
- b. *A database, preferably Internet based, shall be created for the public to easily access the profiles of current legally free foster children awaiting adoption.*

A foster child who is under DHS Permanent Custody (PC) pursuant to Hawaii Revised Statutes, Chapter 587, the Child Protective Act, is eligible for adoption since the child's parental rights have been terminated by the Family Court. However, HRS §578-2(a)(8) specifies that the "child to be adopted if more than ten years of age, unless the court in the best interest of the child dispenses with the child's consent." For some of our older foster youth, they may not be ready to consider adoption, fearing rejection or because of past negative experience. Therefore, it is important for the Department and other significant individuals (e.g., judges, foster parents, therapists, mentors, guardians-ad-litem, social workers, teachers, etc.) to continue the dialogue with the foster youth.

The Department agrees that we should document the results of DHS' participation in AdoptUsKids (Adoption Exchange), HOPE Inc. (who is the contracted agency and not Hawaii Family Forum) and Heart Galley.

DHS has created an internal excel database in 2006 to track PC children/youth without identified permanent caretakers (legal guardians or adoptive parents). Each CWS Section updates the database monthly. Currently, we have approximately 150PC children/youth who are teens with very special needs. Your recommendation to create a public internet database to profile these children/youth is noteworthy and would

require further discussion and consultation with the Family Court, the Coalition, CWS staff, GAL groups and the youth themselves.

3. Contracting monitoring

It's recommended that the DHS continue to expand and improve its contract monitoring processes, especially with the change of Purchase of Services (POS) contracts.

Assistant CWS Program Development Administrators and POS monitors work together to monitor our contracted services. The monitoring is done through feedback from CWS staff, clients and providers, quarterly progress reports by the providers, and on-site monitoring visits by the POS monitors. CWS Section Administrators and Supervisors are expected to have ongoing meetings with POS providers.

4. Division support of the CRP

The CRP recommends that the DHS continue its support of the CRPs in the following manner:

- a. Fund air, water and ground transportation for its Molokai and Lanai representatives,
- b. Fund transportation (air, water and ground), logistical and administrative costs for the semi annual Statewide CRP Meetings,
- c. Promoting CRPs as a valuable asset and an essential part of the CWS system, and not just a condition to receive CAPTA funds.

DHS is committed to fund transportation for Molokai and Lanai representatives and to support an annual statewide CRP Meeting. We agree that CRP is a valuable asset and an essential part of CWS and not just a condition of Federal CAPTA funding.

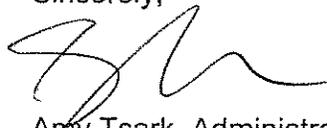
5. Meeting of the Minds

The CRP recommends that division promotes the Maui Section's Meeting of the Minds group to other sections, and if applicable, nationally.

The Maui's success with "Meeting of the Minds" has been shared statewide with all CWS Section Administrators as an effective strategy to promote coordination and communication between State agencies. However, each community is unique and therefore must come up with its own path. Our CWS Section Administrators and Supervisors actively participate and engage in various inter-agency collaboration to increase coordination and communication.

Thank you again for your annual reports and recommendations. We appreciate the commitment and the work accomplished by the Maui CRP and look forward to our continued partnership. Please contact John Walters, Program Development Administrator, at 586-5675 if the Panel has further questions.

Sincerely,



Amy Tsark, Administrator (Acting)
Social Services Division

c: Lillian B. Koller, Director