

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
LEGISLATIVE COMMISSION=S SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE STUDY
OF THE INTEGRATION OF STATE AND LOCAL
CHILD WELFARE SYSTEMS IN NEVADA
(Assembly Concurrent Resolution No. 53, File No. 141, *Statutes of Nevada 1999*)
December 8, 1999
Las Vegas, Nevada**

The second meeting of the Legislative Commission=s Subcommittee on the Study of the Integration of State and Local Child Welfare Systems in Nevada (A.C.R. 53) was held on Wednesday, December 8, 1999, at 9:30 a.m., in Room 4401 of the Grant Sawyer State Office Building, 555 East Washington Avenue, Las Vegas, Nevada. This meeting was video conferenced to Room 3138 of the Legislative Building, 401 South Carson Street, Carson City, Nevada. Pages 3 and 4 of these minutes contain the AMeeting Notice and Agenda.@

SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

Assemblywoman Barbara E. Buckley, Chairwoman
Senator Maggie A. Carlton
Senator Jon C. Porter
Senator Raymond D. Rawson
Assemblyman John C. Carpenter
Assemblywoman Ellen M. Koivisto

SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERS ABSENT:

Senator Bob Coffin
Senator Maurice E. Washington
Assemblyman Bernie Anderson
Assemblyman Joseph E. Dini, Jr.

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL BUREAU STAFF PRESENT:

Elana S. Marton, Senior Research Analyst
Eileen G. O=Grady, Principal Deputy Legislative Counsel
Larry L. Peri, Senior Program Analyst, Fiscal Analysis Division
Terrie Williams, Research Secretary, Research Division

MEETING NOTICE AND AGENDA

Name of Organization: Legislative Commission=s Subcommittee on the Study of the Integration of State and Local Child Welfare Systems in Nevada (Assembly Concurrent Resolution No. 53; File No. 141, *Statutes of Nevada 1999*)

Date and Time of Meeting: Wednesday, December 8, 1999
9:30 a.m.

Place of Meeting: Grant Sawyer State Office Building
Room 4401
555 East Washington Avenue
Las Vegas, Nevada

Note: Some members of the subcommittee may be attending the meeting, and other persons may observe the meeting and provide testimony, through a simultaneous video conference conducted at the following location:

Legislative Building
Room 3138
401 South Carson Street
Carson City, Nevada

AGENDA

- I. Opening Remarks
Assemblywoman Barbara E. Buckley, Chairwoman
- II. Programmatic Reform in Public Child Welfare Systems
 1. Introductory Remarks
Stephen Christian, Children and Families Program,
National Conference of State Legislatures
- 11 Examination of Other States and Discussion of the Essential Components of a AGood@ Child Welfare System
Paul Vincent, Director, The Child Welfare Policy and Practice Group
- III. Child Protective Services: Discussion of a Model System and Nevada=s Current System
Norma Harris, Executive Director, National Child Welfare Leadership Center
- IV. Review of Information Regarding Nevada=s Child Welfare System
 1. Elana S. Marton, Senior Research Analyst, Research Division, Legislative Counsel Bureau (LCB)
 - B. Larry L. Peri, Senior Program Analyst, Fiscal Analysis Division, LCB
- V. Discussion on Nevada=s Current Child Welfare System and Concerns Regarding Possible Reforms
- 11 Sarah Fries, Social Worker, Department of Social Services, Washoe County
 2. Ann Rubin, Child Protective Services Supervisor, Department of Family and Youth Services, Clark County
 3. Mark Fitzgerald, Child Protective Services Specialist, Department of Family and Youth Services, Clark County
 4. Maria Arellano-Grant, Social Work Supervisor, Nevada=s Division of Child and Family Services (DCFS), Las Vegas Regional Office
 5. Joan Blewett, Social Worker III, DCFS, Las Vegas Regional Office

VI. Future Meeting Dates and Topics

VII. Public Testimony

VIII. Adjournment

Note: We are pleased to make reasonable accommodations for members of the public who are disabled and wish to attend the meeting. If special arrangements for the meeting are necessary, please notify the Research Division of the Legislative Counsel Bureau, in writing, at 401 South Carson Street, Carson City, Nevada 89701-4747, or call Terrie Williams, at (775) 684-6825, as soon as possible.

Notice of this meeting was posted in the following Carson City, Nevada, locations: Blasdel Building, 209 East Musser Street; Capitol Press Corps, Basement, Capitol Building; City Hall, 201 North Carson Street; Legislative Building, 401 South Carson Street; and Nevada State Library, 100 Stewart Street. Notice of this meeting was faxed for posting to the following Las Vegas, Nevada, locations: Clark County Office, 500 South Grand Central Parkway; and Grant Sawyer State Office Building, 555 East Washington Avenue.

OPENING REMARKS

Chairwoman Buckley called the meeting to order at 9:50 a.m. and directed the secretary to call roll. Background information was provided by Chairwoman Buckley on the topic of child welfare and why it was selected as a study during the 1999 Interim. She explained that:

- C During the 1999 Legislative Session, Assemblywoman Ellen Koivisto chaired the subcommittee on Assembly Bill 158 (Chapter 435, *Statutes of Nevada* 1999), which enacted Nevada=s implementation of the federal statute (the Federal Adoption and Safe Families Act) which put new mandates on states to attempt to either reunite children with their parents early on, or to find a permanent placement for them in a safe home. The members of the Senate Committee on Judiciary, as well as Assemblywoman Koivisto, urged that a study be conducted during the 1999 interim, with emphasis on changing the bifurcated child welfare system in Nevada; and
- C Stephen A. Shaw, Administrator of the Division of Child and Family Services (DCFS), Nevada=s Department of Human Resources, urged the Legislature to study the child welfare system.

Chairwoman Buckley stated that at its first meeting the subcommittee heard presentations from Mr. Shaw, MaryEllen White, Social Welfare Program Specialist, DCFS, and from representatives from both Washoe and Clark Counties and requested financial data from those three entities. Chairwoman Buckley noted it was the conclusion of the subcommittee at that meeting that children are being harmed by our system and that our system does not work.

She explained the focus of the meeting would be to examine:

- C The components of a well functioning system;
- C The characteristics of a good system by observing how other states have organized their service delivery to make it more effective for children; and
- C What barriers Nevada may face in the three different regions: Clark County, Washoe County, and the rural areas.

(Senator Coffin was unable to attend the meeting due to a family illness.)

PROGRAMMATIC REFORM IN PUBLIC CHILD WELFARE SYSTEMS

Stephen Christian

Stephen Christian, Senior Policy Specialist with the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) explained that NCSL staff are available to serve legislators with research support and provide grant funding to secure testimony from national experts. Mr. Christian discussed the oversight role that state legislators play in the area of child welfare noting that legislators can define outcomes and hold the states= child welfare agencies accountable to achieve those outcomes. He urged the subcommittee to make recommendations, to follow-up on them, and to require that the state welfare agencies report back on the outcomes and the results that would be achieved after legislation is enacted.

Paul Vincent

Paul Vincent, Director of The Child Welfare Policy and Practice Group, discussed the child welfare Apicture@ around the country. One example noted was the Alabama reforms which were driven by a class action lawsuit. Based on a study conducted for the Washington State Institute for Public Policy, Mr. Vincent presented problems in the child welfare foster care system (see Exhibit A) which included:

- C Caseload issues;
- C Training of workers and foster parents;
- C Attrition among workers and foster parents;
- C Funding;
- C Number of transitions with foster children;
- C Special needs children are not well served;
- C Too many children are placed in institutions;
- C Inter-agency collaboration;
- C Assessment of families;
- C Turnover in leadership; and
- C Organizational fragmentation.

According to Mr. Vincent, systems that are not functioning properly find themselves under political pressure, and pressure from the media and legal advocates to improve. Currently, there are 20 to 30 state systems around the country involved in some form of class action litigation.

He then outlined characteristics of an effective child welfare system (see Exhibit B):

- C Manageable caseloads;
- C Skill-based training;
- C Flexible services;
- C Family conferencing systems;
- C Quality of system=s practice;
- C Continuity of leadership;
- C Local level teaching and training;
- C Flexible funding to local counties; and
- C Responsibility and autonomy to counties.

According to Mr. Vincent, structure supports good practice but it will not create it. He addressed various organizational options and conclusions (see Exhibit C):

- C Utilize a regional system where there are regional boundariesC large counties should have a single county entity;
- C Decentralization;
- C Flexible legislative authority for reorganization to permit internal readjustments;
- C New departmental infrastructure in place before the transition occurs;
- C Input from the people that the changes would effect; and
- C Consider and anticipate the costs and assistance on a state level that would be necessary for implementation of changes.

In response to a question from Chairwoman Buckley requesting a description of the ideal caseload for a worker, Mr. Vincent explained that it is difficult to pay attention to families and their issues if you have more than 15 to 18 cases per worker. The Child Welfare Leagues=s standards for the number of new child abuse investigations per month is approximately 12. Discussing various issues relating to workers and their relationships with families of abused or neglected children, he noted that workers need to spend enough time with families to do an adequate assessment, to create a forum with the family and other helpers in the system, and to have the opportunity to build a relationship

with that family.

Senator Carlton asked about risk assessment and if specialization was necessary. Mr. Vincent responded that it is his preference to have one worker do risk assessment and then stay with the family. He commented that handoff from worker to worker can diminish focus and expertise.

Chairwoman Buckley asked about other states similar to Nevada with two large urban counties and what options the subcommittee might consider to try to improve the current system.

Mr. Vincent replied that states with large counties had a comparatively weak state system. The state could be responsible for:

- C Training, and quality or process evaluation; and
- C Development of state plans and policies.

Concluding, Mr. Vincent commented that the counties would need to have sound leadership. He further suggested a regional structure for the rural counties in Nevada.

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CHILD PROTECTIVE SERVICES: DISCUSSION OF A MODEL SYSTEM AND NEVADA=S CURRENT SYSTEM

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Norma Harris

Norma Harris, Executive Director, National Child Welfare Leadership Center, presented a brief summary of the AChild Protective Services= (CPS) Guidelines@ that were recently published by the National Association of Public Child Welfare Administrators, and drew attention to points relevant to Nevada. She explained that the child protection guidelines are a set of recommendations about the operation of CPS, both at the agency and system levels, originally published in 1988 and revised in 1999. The revised edition clarifies the role and establishes the boundaries of CPS. Further, she stated that the guidelines:

- C Address controversies that are present in the State of Nevada regarding conflicting views about the role of CPS;
- C Reflect the consensus across the country that CPS should not be responsible for the protection of all children; and
- C Recognize that the communities must reassert their commitment to protect children and the programs must collaborate to provide a comprehensive array of services.

She listed the following recommendations:

1. CPS agencies should provide flexibility in their response to maltreatment. For example, they should direct families in situations when there is low risk to the children to less restrictive, but more appropriate, programs that promote child safety.

- Ms. Harris commented that the Legislature has passed laws to provide more flexibility to Clark and Washoe Counties to use community services, and in the state system there is some flexibility in the poorer rural sites. In Washoe County, there are 36 social workers who deal directly with families, and the county has a special unit for children. Information from Clark County indicates that staff has approximately 26 cases per month.

2. The agency=s response to a report should include:
 - (1) Interventions directed at the family system. A family centered practice is strength-based, enabling caseworkers to have much better relationships with families.
 - (2) Careful assessment. Assessments have to be individualized and tailored to the needs of the families and children. Emergency shelters cost \$80 per day, are overcrowded, and do not meet the bonding and

attachment needs of infants and toddlers. The staff work in shifts and it is not possible under those circumstances to provide for consistent care giving. Early attachment may be the single most important factor in the healthy physical and emotional development of children. A sufficient number of foster homes for infants and toddlers are essential.

Senator Porter requested a copy of the information from Ms. Harris on her study of Nevada=s system.

Ms. Harris commented that an additional problem in Washoe County is the difference in the rate of payment when a case is transferred from the county to the state. The foster care payments made by the state are less than the county. This creates problems for the children because multiple placements are very traumatic. She suggested the disparity in rates between county and state foster homes be addressed.

3. Agencies should partner with communities in offering a comprehensive range of services. She explained that the creation of a CPS system at the neighborhood or community level enhances the capacity to respond to the needs of families.

Ms. Harris mentioned that this last recommendation is related to the other two because in order to develop flexibility in response to families and to provide a family-centered approach, CPS needs to partner with other agencies, as well as with the families.

Discussing the disparate rates in county and state salaries, Ms. Harris noted:

- C Salaries in Clark County are higher than any other place in the state and the quality of staff and caseworkers at all levels are extremely high in Clark County.
- C The second highest salaries are in Washoe County.
- C The salaries of the state caseworkers are much lower than the counties. Lower salaries create a high turnover rate which is very expensive to the agency (DCFS).

She identified several drawbacks with a county-based system, including a lack of statewide consistency, and a capacity to monitor at a state level.

Continuing, Ms. Harris explained that Washoe County has made significant gains in securing additional staff, conducting more thorough assessments, locating appropriate intervention strategies, as well as partnering with community agencies. She recommended that these gains could be used as a model in terms of bifurcation, adding that it would be useful for Nevada to conduct a pilot program.

In response to questions from the subcommittee, Larry Peri, Senior Program Analyst, Fiscal Analysis Division, LCB, directed members to page 9 of a memorandum dated December 2, 1999, AQuestion 5 - Staff to Caseload Ratios@, in their information packets. (See Exhibit D.)

He observed that caseload ratios for DCFS were:

- C 1 to 38 cases for substitute care;
- C 1 to 20 for CPS investigations (both initial and ongoing); and
- C 1 to 75 for adoptions.

Mr. Peri stated that, for the current fiscal year, an improvement was made in substitute care ratios for DCFS because of the new positions approved by the 1999 Legislature. Ratios for substitute care went from 1 to 38 (as noted above) to 1 to 34. He then discussed Clark County=s situation and indicated the figures were extremely high because the questions were interpreted differently. He noted that the numbers were lower for Fiscal Year (FY) 2000 in the county=s projections.

Washoe County provided caseload ratios for FY 1999 as follows:

- C Investigations for children under 6 years of age were 1 to 12
- C Investigations for children 7 to 18 years of age were 1 to 15

C Ongoing services were 1 to 18

In response to a question from Senator Porter regarding a comparison of Clark County and Washoe County figures, Kirby Burgess, Director of Clark County Department of Family and Youth Services, explained the differences. He stated that on average there are a total of 19 cases per month, per officer.

In reply to a question from Senator Rawson, Mr. Burgess stated he has 62 staff members: thirteen who provide the ongoing service in the community on a long-term basis, and 49 investigators who respond directly to telephone reports within the 72-hour time limit.

Chairwoman Buckley asked that the subcommittee hear testimony from guest speakers regarding the child welfare system and concerns regarding possible reforms before any further presentations by Mr. Peri.

DISCUSSION ON NEVADA'S CURRENT CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM AND CONCERNS REGARDING POSSIBLE REFORMS

Sarah Fries

Sarah Fries, Social Worker, Department of Social Services, Washoe County, discussed the changes that improved the system in Washoe County over the years. These included emphasis on: relationship building between caseworkers and families, decreased caseloads, and more support staff. She discussed the damage done by bifurcated systems when children are transferred to new foster families, and expressed an interest in changing that system. She detailed three main concerns regarding a changeover in the system:

1. That county programs and funding stay enforced.
2. Concurrent planning with children's placements; and
3. Greater support for the foster families.

Senator Porter asked Ms. Fries for two or three things that had made a difference in Washoe County. Ms. Fries stated that the most significant changes were those in support staff, the different safety assessments used, and the reduced caseloads.

Assemblyman Carpenter asked Ms. Fries if she would recommend that the counties take over the welfare system. Ms. Fries stated that this is a very complicated issue and that she did not have an answer to that question. She added that it is very overwhelming as a front line worker to look at the entire system and to figure out how to piece it together; it is a very complex system.

Assemblywoman Koivisto asked Ms. Fries if there were enough clerical support staff to assist with desk work so that the caseworkers could be out doing their jobs. Ms. Fries noted that there is a fair amount of clerical support for the court reports, but much of the work still needs to be completed by the caseworker.

Senator Carlton asked for clarification on how risk assessments are conducted. Ms. Fries stated that in Washoe County a report is taken by an intake worker. The report is then assigned to an investigative worker who visits the home, completes the risk assessment, meets the family, et cetera, and eventually makes the finding of substantiated or unsubstantiated abuse or neglect. After this assessment, the case is turned over to the ongoing unit where there is a reassessment of risk over designated intervals by the assigned caseworker. Senator Carlton then asked if there is something Ms. Fries has to do every day that might be taking more of her time than necessary, such as preparing court reports. She also asked if information is not being sent to the courts that should be. Ms. Fries explained that the information sent to the court is very comprehensive. Typically, 90-day hearings are scheduled, so a caseworker with a caseload of 18 families and cases staggered, would be required to attend up to 10 court hearings in one month. This means that a huge amount of time is spent creating and updating court reports. Additionally, sometimes there are court orders requesting the caseworker return to court in 30 days, which increases the workload. Ms. Fries

estimated that if she has a month with 10 court hearings, she could spend up to a full day per week in court.

Ann Rubin

Ann Rubin, Child Protective Services Supervisor, Department of Family and Youth Services, Clark County, provided prepared written remarks to the subcommittee. (See Exhibit E for complete text.) Her main concerns included:

- C Sufficient resources, whether in a bifurcated or unbifurcated system, so that children and families will receive quality service;
- C Standards will be developed and adhered to;
- C Caseloads will be manageable; and
- C Care will be used during transfer of cases to avoid loss of crucial information.

She commented that worker turnover causes loss of continuity with families. Ms. Rubin stated that, historically, the counties compared to the state, better understand the needs of their communities and given enough resources can provide the services that meet these needs.

Assemblywoman Koivisto questioned the effect of the shortened time lines of the federal legislation and our state legislation and if that created a problem. In response, Ms. Rubin stated that it did affect agencies, especially in emergency cases when severe physical abuse is involved.

Mark Fitzgerald

Mark Fitzgerald, Child Protective Services Specialist, Department of Family and Youth Services, Clark County, described his experiences while working with both the state and county systems. According to Mr. Fitzgerald, the individual workers are the problem, not the bifurcated system. Contributing to the current problems with the system are:

- C The number of cases;
- C The transfer of those cases from county to state; and
- C The salary differences.

(See Exhibit F to these minutes.)

Maria Arellano-Grant

Maria Arellano-Grant, Social Work Supervisor, Nevada=s Division of Child and Family Services (DCFS), Las Vegas Regional Office, distributed handouts to the subcommittee displaying child placement needs and the responsibilities of social workers. (See Exhibit G and Exhibit H.) Ms. Arellano-Grant stated that the problems between the two programs include transfer and loss of information. Concerns mentioned regarding creating an unbifurcated system included pay cuts, job security, and recognizing that skills, education, and experience are important in the placement of workers.

Ms. Arellano-Grant=s concerns relating to the current system included the need for more workers with smaller caseloads and fewer moves for the children.

In response to questions from the subcommittee, Ms. Arellano-Grant stated there is adequate training for workers, but sometimes the individual worker does not utilize that training or there are territorial differences between the county and state agencies. She commented that the most important issue to the child welfare system is the collection of information through each step of every case.

Joan Blewett

Joan Blewett, Social Worker III, DCFS, Las Vegas Regional Office, working in the foster parent adoption unit, addressed the following issues:

1. Child Haven=s procedure to move children quickly because of the expense.
2. Foster care programs, which create situations when foster parents are unable to keep the children.

Ms. Blewett stated that caseload and time spent on the job are tremendous and county and state organizational differences are a big concern. She commented that individual workers are not providing necessary information or taking the time to locate the unoffending parent or another relative for child placement. Her concerns relating to an unbifurcated system are:

- C Federal funds and how they would be distributed at the county level; and
- C The requirements between the state and the counties with respect to professional licenses.

According to Ms. Blewett, child welfare is a state responsibility. Federal funds are distributed to the state and the programs started by the state should remain with the state. In conclusion, Ms. Blewett noted that both the state and the counties need more accountability.

REVIEW OF INFORMATION REGARDING NEVADA=S CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM

Larry L. Peri

Larry L. Peri, identified previously, discussed a memorandum addressed to Assemblywoman Buckley dated December 2, 1999. (See Exhibit D which includes memorandum and attachments.) He explained that because some of the information presented at the October 28, 1999, meeting was in different formats and did not utilize comparable data, the subcommittee asked staff to prepare a more concise comparison. The three agencies were contacted for information: Clark and Washoe Counties and the DCFS. (A copy of the memorandum provides the questions submitted to the agencies and is included in Exhibit D to these minutes.)

Mr. Peri discussed a table that would present the responses in a side-by-side format in order to provide an overview of the major indicators (specifically revenues, expenditures, number of positions, caseloads, et cetera.) He pointed out that there was some confusion and interpretations were not consistent. In summary, it was agreed that Mr. Peri and the three agencies would meet and review the responses to define terms. Clark County did however, provide an update to the subcommittee members to clarify the information previously submitted. (See Exhibit I.)

Mr. Peri explained the tables: (See Exhibit D.)

1. The first table summarizes the revenues that support the child welfare activities in the last complete FY 1999, and then what was legislatively approved or county commission approved for the current FY 2000.
2. The second table indicates how the total revenues were distributed in broad expenditure categories.
3. The third table indicates that in the last complete fiscal year the DCFS had approximately 287 full-time equivalent positions (FTEs) and gives a breakdown by definition of administrative, professional, and support.

He noted that the three entities interpreted the staffing question (question 3) differently. For example, there were no employees shown under Administrative@ in Clark County, rather these were included in the Overhead and expenditures@ section. Washoe County has an Administrative Services Division, so all employees within that division were counted as administrative staff, whether they were clerical positions or a director of the department.

Chairwoman Buckley requested a breakdown of all the child welfare positions and other costs, such as debt service for bonds and depreciation of assets.

Ms. Buckley noted that this information is necessary for the subcommittee to know exactly what the resources are in an attempt to reallocate and increase the services to our children. Subcommittee members will then know where the expenditures are for each entity. Other members requested that this information be as precise and simple as possible so that it would be easily understood by both the subcommittee and the public.

Mr. Peri explained that in the supplemental revised packet received from Clark County, specific information regarding the position titles and descriptions is provided.

The next table reflects caseloads and the number of children the various entities work with at any given time. (See Exhibit I.)

Mr. Peri directed subcommittee members to the staff-to-caseload ratio chart which indicates for FY 1999 that DCFS divided its services into three major areas: substitute care, investigations (both initial and ongoing), and adoptions. The 1999 Legislature approved enhancements so that there now is an actual caseload figure, a budgeted caseload figure, and a Astandard@ caseload figure.

Senator Porter recommended that if the proper data cannot be compiled, an audit should be conducted by the Legislative Counsel Bureau (LCB) to obtain the necessary information.

Mr. Peri reviewed the updated response from Clark County to clarify these caseload figures. The final comparison discussed was average cost per case. Clark County chose to use workload figure indicators and Washoe County gave two examples: cost per referral or cost per investigation service.

Chairwoman Buckley directed Mr. Peri to obtain a third version to be presented to the subcommittee at the next meeting.

Elana Marton

Elana Marton, Senior Research Analyst, Research Division, LCB, directed subcommittee members to a memorandum addressed to Chairwoman Buckley and attached charts (1 to 6), dated December 2, 1999, (Exhibit J to these minutes). These charts are a compilation of information provided to Ms. Marton in response to questions that arose at the October 28, 1999, meeting of the Legislative Commission=s subcommittee. She stated that Chart 1 data is a comparison of children being served on a particular day by DCFS, Clark County and Washoe County. Chart 2 indicates the daily rates for children in care. The following care costs were reported by each entity:

1. Emergency Family Foster Care
 - C DCFS pays \$25 per day.
 - C Clark County pays \$28 per day for private and individual foster families and \$75 to \$90 for group corporate.
 - C Washoe County pays \$40 per day.
2. Family Foster Care
 - C The base for DCFS and Washoe County is the same - \$12 per day for children 12 years of age and under and \$14.40 per day for children over 13 years of age.
 - C Currently Clark County does not have any children in family foster care.
3. Group Foster Care
 - C Both DCFS and Washoe County pay the same rate, about \$40 to \$100 per day for group care (levels 1 through 3). The DCFS pays more than that for higher levels of group care (levels 4 and 5), which are not provided by Washoe County.
 - \$ Clark County=s rate is \$172 per day.

In addition to the daily rates of care, the individual responses noted respite care, school supplies or medical services, transportation and other support services that are provided. Ms. Marton noted that Chart 3 indicates the average length of time children spend in the three major types of care:

1. In-Home Services
 - a. Clark County - 8.6 months
 - b. Washoe County - 10.7 months

2. Emergency Family Foster Care
 - a. Clark County - 27 days
 - b. Washoe County - 97 days
3. Emergency Shelter Facilities
 - a. Clark County - 13.8 days
 - b. Washoe County - 19 days

This same data was not provided by DCFS; however, DCFS stated that the length of time a case is open is under one year, with one-half of all cases being closed within two years. The average DCFS case length is 3.1 years. Responding to questions by Chairwoman Buckley, Ms. Marton clarified that these figures included all children who were wards of the state.

Continuing, Ms. Marton noted the information in Chart 4 included placement of sibling groups, pointing out:

- C 50 percent of DCFS cases are separated;
- C Washoe County=s rate is 6 percent; and
- C Clark County=s rate is 22 percent.

Reviewing Chart 5 reflecting recidivism rates, Ms. Marton noted that Clark County does not track this information. Comparisons were made over the past three years. The DCFS used a fiscal quarter and Washoe County chose one month at the end of one fiscal quarter. Ms. Marton explained that recidivism is defined as two or more substantiated investigations within one year within the same household. Rates have been reduced as follows:

- C Washoe County rates are down from 19 percent in FY 1996-1997 to 8 percent in FY 1998-1999.
- C The DCFS rate for FY 1996-1997 was 11.6 percent and was reduced to 10.2 percent in FY 1998-1999.

Chart 6 compares the number of licensed foster homes in Nevada. The information was provided by DCFS. The average number of licensed homes in southern Nevada is 384; 147 in northern Nevada; and, 80 for the rural areas. The total number of occupied beds, statewide is 57percent for family foster care and 61 percent for group foster care.

Chairwoman Buckley asked if the hiring freeze affected staff positions and how many are not filled. In response, Mr. Shaw (identified earlier in these minutes) stated that the total FTEs are for the child welfare aspect of DCFS; the hiring freeze affects the number of positions that are vacant at any time; and the budget reflects that all positions are filled, without vacations, sick days, or turnover rate.

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Jim Baumann

Jim Baumann, Administrative Services Officer, DCFS, discussed vacancy savings and other unfunded issues. He noted that overtime salaries are not in the budget, as well as the requirement that at any given time seven to nine positions are vacant. He stated that vacant positions are usually in rural Nevada, so that no positions are held open. At the end of 1998, there were some problems with vacancy savings so DCFS had a self-imposed hiring freeze until Governor Guinn=s review of all positions. At the present time, the division has no need to hold any positions vacant.

Mr. Shaw stated that the FTEs the division has now are around 20 positions. The temporary hiring freeze is still in place, but all of the vacancies in the child welfare area are being approved and positions are being filled as quickly as possible.

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Senator Rawson commented that if you have a 20 percent turnover there is a certain number of days that those positions are open while you are advertising, thereby creating vacancy savings.

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Mr. Shaw added that DCFS is not budgeted for overtime, but child protective workers must make immediate response to reports of abuse and neglect whenever they occur, including after regular work hours or on weekends. The workers= overtime hours are compensated with vacancy savings.

In response to questions from the subcommittee regarding the turnover rate at DCFS, Mr. Shaw stated that it varies from region to region, but because of the large pay disparity in the south, the turnover rate is greater there. He further indicated that the bifurcation affects the agency differently in each region. For example, he explained in the North there is a parallel foster care system and you might see 3.2 moves per child under three years old, while this is not the case in the South because of Child Haven.

Responding to Senator Rawson's specific question regarding the pay disparity between the counties, Mr. Shaw stated that it was approximately 30 percent in the south and 10 percent in the north.

Mr. Burgess stated that the salary of an entry level case worker with Clark County is in the area of \$35,000 base salary (not including retirement or benefits) and would top out at \$55,000.

Chairwoman Buckley addressed questions to Mr. Shaw regarding the placement of sibling groups and the differences between the state and the counties. Mr. Shaw responded that:

- C There are different levels of care for treatment needs and often siblings needing differing levels of care will be separated for higher levels of treatment.
- C Children are returned to their families one at a time, on a trial basis, over a one-year period and that counts as a split sibling group.
- C Clark and Washoe Counties have institutions like Child Haven and Kids Cottages that can house large numbers of children.

Mr. Burgess attributed the difference in the numbers of sibling groups that are separated to the fact that Clark County has Child Haven and other emergency shelter facilities which enable it to keep siblings together.

Mr. Shaw commented on the Unity Project, a new computer data system that will provide a monthly report on siblings. He added that DCFS staff is very committed to keeping siblings together at all costs.

In response to a question by Assemblywoman Koivisto regarding compensating workers for overtime, Mr. Shaw stated that they receive overtime pay, but it is not in the budget. In conclusion, Mr. Shaw stated that a pilot project in Washoe County that began November 1, 1999, will meld the disparity between the county emergency shelter and the state group foster care rates.

Kirby Burgess, along with Susan Laveway, Clark County Assistant Finance Director and Barbara Straight, Clark County Fiscal Agent, answered questions posed by the subcommittee regarding the data collected. The suggestion again was made that all the entities meet so that they can provide all the information the subcommittee needs to make the most informed recommendations.

Chairwoman Buckley requested clarification on references made to private and corporate homes. Mr. Burgess explained that the information listed could be misleading because emergency foster care refers to children who go into Child Haven. Other private facilities such as Westcare, a corporate facility, or a group home placement such as one where special needs children are placed, are different from state facilities.

Chairwoman Buckley questioned if Clark County placed children in individual foster homes, or were they all placed in group homes. Barbara Straight (previously identified) addressed this question, and stated that shelter homes are not referred to as foster care and that Clark County does not provide foster care. The children are provided with emergency placement on a short-term basis. She further defined Aprivate@ as a contract with an individual, in a home setting with one to six children, and Acorporate@ as professionally staffed homes, such as Olive Crest. Senator Porter asked if the private homes on Chart 2 (Exhibit J) and the others just defined are included under emergency shelter facilities.

In response, Ms. Straight stated that the emergency shelter facility is the Child Haven campus. The disparity in cost is between long-term and short-term foster care. Clark County pays more because it only handles short-term situations. Chairwoman Buckley stated that perhaps there would still be placement issues between county and state facilities even with the bifurcated system and asked how long the children stay in county facilities. In response, Mr.

Burgess stated the average stay in a county facility is 30 days.

Chairwoman Buckley directed Mr. Burgess to explore the county's philosophy on institutional care for a child who may be there for 30 to 90 days. Mr. Burgess commented that if the county were to receive the responsibility of the whole system then it would need to explore something beyond what it currently has, expanding and enhancing the current foster care system. Regarding questions raised about the problem of infants in Child Haven, Mr. Burgess stated that efforts (such as extensive use of volunteers) are made to remove the institutional feel for the children as much as possible.

Chairwoman Buckley stated that in redesigning the system it is paramount to recognize that any institutional system is not as beneficial as a warm loving home. While there is a need for Child Haven, especially for sibling groups and difficult placements, she stated that the county should not rely on institutional placement at the expense of the children's best interests because it is more cost efficient to take care of children in an institution.

Mr. Burgess, in response to a question by Senator Porter regarding the emergency foster care system and availability, stated that:

- C On any given day there are about 30 youngsters in those various placements.
- C There is a shortage of emergency foster homes, especially for the smaller youngster that needs the intimate care.
- C The recruitment and retainment of this type of home is a challenge for the county. An overcrowding situation exists at Child Haven. It is constructed for 80 youngsters and may have as many as 120.
- C The county is in the process of adding another 35 to 40 beds but that will not be enough. due to the growth of the community.
- C Additional shelter parents are needed to help with the overcrowding situation.

Senator Porter requested more information on equating the value that CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocates) is providing for Clark County in working with these children. Mr. Burgess stated that CASA is very important for the children, as it serves a role in advocating for children. It is a valuable program that should not be overlooked, he said.

Responding to questions from Assemblyman Carpenter regarding the cost of Child Haven and if in some circumstances a family foster care situation would be less expensive, Mr. Burgess explained that Child Haven expenses are higher because:

- C County workers are employed and 24 hour per day supervision is provided; and
- C Food, lodging, schooling, nursing, and a full-time psychological staff are provided.

Mr. Burgess stated that Child Haven is an emergency-type shelter facility and if Clark County assumed the responsibility of the entire child welfare system, then the existing foster care system would be enhanced by recruiting and retaining more foster homes.

Responding to Chairwoman Buckley's comment that perhaps children were staying in emergency facilities because of the bifurcated system, Mr. Burgess said there is some lag time between services but if there was a single system, those services would occur in succession, benefitting the children and their families.

Chairwoman Buckley directed Mr. Burgess to provide clarification on issues discussed by the subcommittee and to provide responses at the next meeting.

Mike Capello and Sharon Gibbons

Chairwoman Buckley called on Mike Capello, Division Director for Children's Services and Sharon Gibbons, Children's Services Coordinator, Washoe County. They addressed the subcommittee regarding:

- C Areas where the three entities are making comparisons and the need to work together on the data for proper

comparison.

C Differences in systems between Washoe and Clark County.

- (a) In Clark County if the child cannot be returned home after the first evidentiary hearing, those children either go to a family member or on to DCFS. In Washoe County a child may remain in foster care with another level of service so there is a parallel system with the state that does not exist in Clark County.
- (b) Washoe County=s ongoing workers are working on in-home cases, plus a foster care caseload.

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FUTURE MEETING DATES AND TOPICS

The next meeting was scheduled for January 27, 1999.

PUBLIC TESTIMONY

Chairwoman Buckley asked if there were any members of the public who wished to testify. Seeing none she moved for adjournment.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 3:20 p.m. Exhibit K is the AAttendance Record@ for this meeting.

Respectfully submitted,

Sally Trotter
Senior Research Secretary

Elana S. Marton
Senior Research Analyst

APPROVED BY:

Barbara E. Buckley, Chairwoman

Date: _____

LIST OF EXHIBITS

Exhibit A is a paper copy of transparencies provided by Paul Vincent, Director of the Child Welfare Policy and Practice Group titled AThe National Child Welfare Picture.@

Exhibit B is a paper copy of transparencies used by Paul Vincent, entitled ACharacteristics of Effective Child Welfare Systems.@

Exhibit C is a document titled ASummary and Conclusions: An Examination of Organizational and Structure and Programmatic Reform in Public Child Welfare Systems,@ provided by Paul Vincent during his presentation to the subcommittee.

Exhibit D is a copy of a memorandum to Assemblywoman Barbara E. Buckley, Chairwoman, dated December 2, 1999, from Larry L. Peri, Senior Program Analyst, Fiscal Analysis Division, regarding ASummary of Child Welfare Data.@ It includes summary charts of information received in response to request by the Legislative Commission=s Subcommittee on the Study of the Integration of State and Local Child Welfare Systems in Nevada (Assembly Concurrent Resolution No. 53).

Exhibit E is written testimony provided by Ann Rubin, Child Protective Services Supervisor, Department of Family and Youth Services, Clark County.

Exhibit F is written testimony provided by Mark Fitzgerald, Child Protective Services Specialist, Department of Family and Youth Services, Clark County.

Exhibit G is a document provided by Maria Arellano-Grant, Social Work Supervisor, Nevada=s Division of Child and Family Services, Las Vegas Regional Office, titled AThe children-placement needs.@

Exhibit H is a document titled AWhat do foster care social workers do?@ provided by Maria Arellano-Grant, Social Worker Supervisor, Division of Child and Family Services.

Exhibit I is updated information provided by Clark County Department of Family and Youth Services in response to request by the Legislative Commission=s Subcommittee on the Study of the Integration of State and Local Child Welfare Systems in Nevada (A.C.R. 53).

Exhibit J is a memorandum to Assemblywoman Barbara E. Buckley from Elana S. Marton, Senior Research Analyst, Research Division, dated December 2, 1999, regarding ANevada Child Welfare Data@ including attached charts.

Exhibit K is the AAttendance Record@ for this meeting.

Copies of the exhibits are on file in the Research Library of the Legislative Counsel Bureau, Carson City, Nevada. You may contact the library at 775/684-6827.