

AUDIT PROPOSAL

Foster Care and Adoption: Reviewing Case Plan Tasks and Adoption Rates

SOURCE

This audit proposal was requested by Senator Oletha Faust-Goudeau.

BACKGROUND

Kansas' foster care program is administered by the Department for Children and Families (DCF) and has been privatized since 1997. The department currently contracts with four service providers—KVC Kansas, St. Francis, TFI and Cornerstones—to provide foster care services across the state. The foster care program is charged with protecting children who may be physically or mentally abused or neglected. The department may provide preventive services to a family when child abuse is suspected with the goal of keeping the child in the home. However, if preventive services are not successful or if the danger to the child appears to warrant action, the department may ask the county or district attorney to petition the court to place the child in its custody.

After a court order puts a child in the custody of the department, the child may be placed back with the family with the written permission of the court, with relatives or friends of the family, with a foster family, in a group home, or in an appropriate state-operated facility. Child welfare case management providers, who are private contractors with the state, develop a case plan that includes the overall goal for children assigned to them (usually reunification with the family) along with the individual tasks that a child and the parents need to accomplish to achieve that goal. Those tasks may include such things as drug tests, individual or group therapy, and parenting classes. The district court can add tasks to the case plan as it sees fit.

Legislators have expressed concern about tasks included in children's case plans including the total number of tasks parents are required to complete, their relevance to the children's reunification with their family, and the addition of tasks throughout the process. Additionally, legislators have expressed interest in knowing how adoption rates for foster care children vary based on the children's age, gender, and ethnicity.

AUDIT OBJECTIVES AND TENTATIVE METHODOLOGY

The audit objectives listed below represent the questions that we would answer through our audit work. The proposed steps for each objective are intended to convey the type of work we would do, but are subject to change as we learn more about the audit issues and are able to refine our methodology.

Objective 1: Do tasks included in foster children's case plans appear reasonable and relevant to their successful reunification with their families and are they being completed by children's parents? Our tentative methodology would include the following:

- Select a projectable sample of foster care children's case plans for further review. This sample would include cases that are both recent and old and would reflect a cross section of children of different ages.
- Review those case plans to identify how many tasks are included, who included them, what they require, when they were added, and when they must be completed for a child to be reunited with their family. As part of this work, we would also evaluate how much progress parents have made in completing assigned tasks.
- Interview contractor staff and court officials to collect their rationale for including the tasks they did in the child's case plan.
- Interview parents attempting to reunite with their children to collect their opinions on the relevance of their assigned case plan tasks and to identify any obstacles they face in completing them.
- Based on that cumulative information we would conclude on whether case plan tasks generally appear reasonable and relevant, whether parents are generally completing them, and any obstacles or challenges parents face in doing so.

Objective 2: Do adoption rates for children in foster care vary based on factors such as age, gender, and ethnicity? Our tentative methodology would include the following:

- Work with DCF officials to collect information on the placement results for a large and projectable sample of children for whom adoption was the permanency goal.
- Using that information, evaluate how the adoption rates for these children varies based on factors such as age, gender, and ethnicity.
- Interview DCF and contractor officials to collect their explanation for any significant differences in adoption rates we identified.

ESTIMATED RESOURCES

We estimate this audit would require a team of **three (3) auditors** for a total of **five (5) months** (from the time the audit starts to our best estimate of when it would be ready for the committee).