

LBA Performance Audit Report Summary:

Department of Health and Human Services, Division For Children Youth and Families: Foster Family Care Performance Audit Report – September 2001

The purpose of our audit was to assess: 1) the effectiveness of the State's foster care system, 2) the foster parent recruiting process, 3) pre-service and in-service training, 4) the process for ensuring the rights of foster parents, 5) on-going support for foster parents from the Division of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF), and 6) the current status of the foster care observations noted in our 1993 performance audit report of the Child Settlement Program. The audit period includes the eight years from FY 1993 through FY 2000.

RSA 161:2, II, authorizes the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) to be responsible for the development and administration of child welfare including services and care of children in foster homes. RSA 161:2, IV, authorizes the department to supervise foster family homes and child placing agencies, and requires rules be adopted to ensure children are placed in a wholesome living environment. The Bureau of Children, DCYF is responsible for providing services to children in foster family home placements. The division carries out its responsibilities through its central office located in Concord and 12 district offices located throughout the State.

Observations

We noted 29 observations and recommendations regarding the foster family care system. Eleven observations concern recruitment, retention, matching, training, and licensing issues. Seven observations and recommendations address support of foster family parents. Eleven observations concern the program's management, the last of which recommends the department report to the Legislature on division improvements in determining the foster family care program's efficiency and improving the program's effectiveness.

Foster Parent Recruitment, Retention, Matching, Training, And Licensing Need Improvement

We found that the foster family care system's recruitment and retention efforts are insufficient to provide and maintain a varied pool of trained, licensed foster parents to appropriately match with the needs of each foster child. Pre-service training has improved yet needs more improvement. We also found DCYF licensing issues in the following areas: statutory and administrative licensing requirements unmet, rules inconsistently maintained, requirements were unenforceable, and children in placement in unlicensed and unpermitted homes.

Foster Parent Support Needs Improvement

We found that, although required by statute, the DCYF did not have foster family home compensation rules, nor did the DCYF rate setter consult with the DHHS advisory board. We also found that the DCYF needs to improve its reimbursement of foster care expenses, as well as the timeliness and accuracy of reimbursement payments. We also report that the DCYF needs to

improve: making monthly in-home visits to foster children, responsiveness to foster parents, and after business hours and weekend emergency support.

Foster Care System Management Needs Improvement

DHHS and DCYF management are responsible for overseeing the foster family care system and its operations. We found that management needs to improve: statutory compliance; measuring, evaluating, and monitoring program performance and services including operations and finances; overseeing therapeutic level foster care; and controls over the foster care system including operations and resources.