

Oklahoma Department of Human Services Response to Co-Neutral Commentary One, October 2013

The Oklahoma Department of Human Services appreciates the Co-Neutrals' recognition of the progress our agency has made during the first year of implementing the Pinnacle Plan. This includes the reorganization of Child Welfare Services to achieve sustained progress, greater accountability and transparency, as well as more effective and efficient communication and performance. The new management team assembled within Child Welfare Services ensures new and current workers will have the necessary leadership and supervisory guidance to carry out their child welfare responsibilities.

Another main point of progress was the integration of the Office of Client Advocacy and Child Protective Services investigation protocols, standards and reporting systems. This change will provide us with consistent child abuse and neglect data in both family homes and settings where children are placed in congregate care such as group homes and residential treatment facilities.

We believe we have in fact made a lot of progress in just one year's time. This is not a sprint, it is a marathon. We acknowledge that we have not yet met every target, however, we are totally committed to making the necessary improvements to our system that everyone wants. We fully expect to meet the Pinnacle Plan goals over the next four years.

DHS greatly appreciates the Governor's and the Legislature's strong support of our work and in securing \$57 million in additional funding to assist DHS in meeting our obligations under the settlement agreement.

We wholeheartedly agree with the co-neutrals this is an iterative process to establish baselines and targets for DHS to report progress with Pinnacle Plan initiatives. This will be an ongoing process for some metrics due to the realization that further clarification is needed about the data which could not have been predicted when the Metrics Plan was agreed upon. For example, the public reporting requires DHS to post data each month prior to the co-neutral's validation process. The validation process may result in additional changes in previously reported data, future targets and measures. Both parties are continuously working on the data and what the data means.

Ongoing review of the data may often result in revised measurements. Another example of a changing data set is the foster home recruitment goal. DHS, in good faith, recruited and approved in excess of the target number of foster homes as defined in the baselines and metrics both parties agreed to previously. Only after further reflection on the data did the issue of how long the approved homes would be open without children being placed become a factor in determining the counting of such homes towards the target.

Obviously, DHS needs a sufficient number of active foster homes to care for the children coming into state care. To recruit homes that are never used would be a waste of resources.

DHS committed in the Pinnacle Plan to build a pool of homes and create a matching process whereby children would be placed with the best foster home and avoid multiple moves. To have a successful matching process, DHS will need a wide variety of homes across the state in which to place children together with their siblings, in their home communities and in their same schools. In a statewide system such as this, it stands to reason that some of the homes may not have children placed in them for a period of time.

We understand further discussion of the metrics in this data set is warranted in light of these circumstances and additional consideration given to the goal of a statewide matching process. We are committed to continuing our work with the co-neutrals to further refine data collections and definitions, and to ensure accuracy and consistency in our data reporting. We appreciate the expertise and the guidance offered by the co-neutrals as we work together to develop the measurements of our progress.