

Colorado's Child Welfare System: Reforms and Improvements Underway to Keep Children Safe and Families Healthy

1.) SHARED VISION

Counties are working in partnership with the state and others to improve the child welfare system.

- ❖ Colorado's child welfare system works hard to keep children safe. However, government alone cannot keep every child safe. We need to continue to **work together as a community** to share information and concerns, identify and evaluate unsafe situations, and strive to prevent child abuse and neglect.

- ❖ Counties **support the Governor's Three-Year Strategic Plan** to redesign the state's child welfare system, "Keeping Kids Safe and Families Healthy." The plan includes these components:
 - Create a common practice approach and philosophy for all counties,
 - Expand the Differential Response model to more counties,
 - Use data to drive decisions and improve performance and outcomes,
 - Strengthen caseworker and supervisor training,
 - Take steps to align funding with the spectrum of child welfare needs
 - Improve transparency by expanding the amount of case information that can be made public.

2.) REFORM EFFORTS

We acknowledge that work needs to be done to improve our child welfare system, and are proud of the progress that Colorado has already made to implement responsible and informed changes.

- ❖ All **64 counties are implementing significant systems improvements** in partnership with Governor Hickenlooper, the Colorado Department of Human Services, Casey Family Programs, the Annie E. Casey Foundation, child protection advocates, non-profits across the state, and the legislative and judicial branches.
- ❖ In addition to supporting Governor Hickenlooper's three-year strategic plan, counties and the State have **already implemented or begun to implement 33 of 35 recommendations** made by the Child Welfare Action Committee created under former Governor Ritter in 2009.
- ❖ Many system improvements that have been implemented by the **State and counties have received national recognition** for improving support of families and protecting children, including:
 - **C-STAT**, a data-driven system that analyzes child welfare performance and highlights performance areas in need of improvement;
 - **Colorado's Child Welfare Training Academy**, created in 2009, which is developing a skilled workforce dedicated to ensuring safety, permanency, and well-being of Colorado's children;
 - Colorado counties are collaborating with the State and several federal partners to build a **statewide Child Welfare Practice Model**, which will address consistency, quality improvement and best practices for child protection services.
 - Expansion of the **Differential Response pilot program** to additional counties; this nationally-supported best practice allows workers to use more than one method of response to reports of abuse or neglect and promotes higher levels of family engagement.
 - Legislation passed in 2012 that requires "**near fatal**" and "**egregious abuse or neglect**" incidents to be reviewed by the state's Child Fatality Review Team.

- Legislation passed in 2012 requiring the **timely public disclosure of child fatality reviews** on the State's Web site;
- Colorado pursued and attained a **federal Title IV-E Waiver**, which will help Colorado to fund early intervention and prevention activities and wrap-around supports for families. By providing supports before a family's situation escalates to crisis, we can help families to achieve self-sufficiency, eliminate major stressors that can lead to abuse and neglect, and reduce out-of-home child placements.
- Expansion of '**Permanency Roundtables**' to support the well-being of children statewide and keep families intact when appropriate.

3.) ACCOUNTABILITY AND TRANSPARENCY

Counties are highly accountable to the state and support efforts that enhance transparency while upholding the privacy of families.

- ❖ Colorado counties are highly accountable to the State and are subject to **22 levels of child welfare review** at the local, state and federal levels.
- ❖ Counties support efforts like C-STAT to show increased transparency for our performance.
- ❖ Colorado counties **are ready and willing to talk about positive outcomes and improvements** being made in the child welfare system, **without compromising the privacy and wellbeing of families** who came into the system while in crisis.
- ❖ **Counties will continue to abide by Colorado statute that protects the confidentiality of families and children** involved in our system under all circumstances (except for child fatality reviews released by the State.) This law includes *never* releasing *case-specific* information or comment to the media.

4.) LOCAL-STATE PARTNERSHIP

Keeping children safe and families healthy depends on finding *local* solutions to meet their needs; that can best be achieved under our county-administered, state-supervised system.

- ❖ Our commitment to a county-administered, state-supervised system is **not a matter of control or turf**.
- ❖ The suggestion to reform Colorado's child welfare system into a **state-administered system simply *has not been informed by data or best-practice***, and has **not been proven** to protect children as well as a county-administered system.
- ❖ We share CDHS Director Reggie Bicha's view that our county-administered, state-supervised system is a stronger approach to child protection, because it offers a **balance of state policy and consistency** along with the **flexibility for communities to tailor local solutions for families**.
- ❖ Local governments are more responsive to citizens and have a better understanding of the economic and social factors that impact families.