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Subject: Notes from today's DSS Hearing

Ted – Below are the notes Haley and I have put together from today's DSS hearing. There were seven main lines of questioning, which we have summarized below. Note that Senators Young, Lourie, and Shealy were present along with Massey, O'Dell, Alexander, and Turner.

1. Case load numbers and oversight:

- Young:
 - Wants to be able to recommend more funding for more case workers if needed and, therefore, wants to know a specific number of case loads and also case workers needed. LK could not give a specific number but did say they were researching other states to finalize a recommendation.
 - Asked about a document showing a case load goal for DSS and wondering how close DSS was to that goal. LK explained the 13% (?) vacancy at the agency and said the progress will look much improved in five months.
- Massey:
 - Wanted to confirm differentiations among types of cases and why some may be more intensive than others, making some case loads higher than others. LK confirmed.
 - Concerned about how case workers were trained to manage case loads and also oversight of case loads at the county level, including the chain of command to let LK know that additional help might be needed. LK said her door was always open, but a case worker would report to his supervisor, then the supervisor would report to the county director, and then the county director would report to LK. LK said that counties were used to "managing the unmanageable" and, therefore, having been coming forward with requests for help as they should, which is a problem she is trying to change.
 - Wants to know if the average case load is not the best indicator, then what is? He wants to know the best way or a uniform standard of how they could know if case workers were overworked. LK said she gets weekly snapshots where eventually she could see trends and would work on that, but she could not give a specific answer.
- Lourie:
 - Asked about case load goals that were currently in place and what standards were currently being used. LK said there are no required standards, but Lourie showed a 2009 document he received showing standards. LK said she would have to look at it and get back to him. LK said there was a national association certification with rigorous standards that some states have opted to do.
- Shealy:
 - Concerned about case load numbers being too high. LK explained new hiring and training processes along with the agency's new continuous employment model and that it will take five months to implement.

2. Misunderstandings or discrepancies in DSS data:

- Lourie:
 - Asked about a chart that showed (or didn't show) that a child was supposed to be seen within 24 hours. LK tried to explain; the answer was unclear.
 - Asked about differences between annual reports vs. push reports; O'Dell helped explain the differences.
 - Asked about an internal DSS email that was preparing a list of employees for the LAC. Discussion

- unclear.
- Asked about Richland County data, not believing the case load number (200) could be accurate from the stories he's heard. LK said she is now personally committed to being involved in Richland County, receiving weekly reports of caseloads over 30.

3. Inquiry about a criminal investigation:

- Lourie:
 - Asked LK if she knew if DSS was under a SLED or federal investigation. LK said not, but she wouldn't be surprised if the agency was audited due to all of the hearings and issues that have been raised.

4. Richland County:

- Lourie:
 - Asked about the 10 months between the CASA letter from Paige Greene that was received in July to the announcement of a plan of action in Richland County.
 - LK answered that there have been several actions taken during the 10 month period including training of staff, performance coaching, and increased staffing.

5. Webb Case:

- Young:
 - Said the circumstances surrounding the case are troubling. There was mishandling of the case and the information, appropriate actions were not taken difficulty arose surrounding trying to make contact. Should have contacted law enforcement.
 - LK answered that she instituted the substantive policy change after this case that removed the discretionary time period that the agency would defer to staff or contact law enforcement, now it is mandatory that law enforcement be contacted no later than 72 hours after a report is made and there is difficulty locating a child.

6. Employee Retention:

- Young:
 - Asked about the issues agency is facing with turnover and employees moving on, interested in what an appropriate wage would be. LK went into a discussion about the low pay and potential incentives to increase retention.
- Lourie:
 - Expressed his concern with employees being incentivized because it causes them to focus on the numbers instead of the children.
- Massey:
 - Asked about what an employee looks like. LK addressed education, required to have a bachelor's degree and the intro salary.
 - Painted a picture of college graduates not running out to apply for these positions. LK agreed that the agency is working to explore options and the agency is focused on rewarding and incentivizing particular areas of the job.

7. Legislative Recommendations/Actions

- Young:
 - Asked about the NCIC record searches that permit DSS to search abuse and neglect records outside of the state. LK directed him to the notebook where this capability was requested.
 - Asked if DSS would be in support of a change to the central registry statute that removes the discretionary language that is currently within the courts authority in making a finding to have someone placed on the central registry. LK said that she would get back with him after she discusses with legal staff.