

## **B 006 08**

### **EXECUTIVE ORDER**

#### **Creating the Governor's Child Welfare Action Committee**

Pursuant to the authority vested in the Office of the Governor of the State of Colorado, I, Bill Ritter, Jr., Governor of the State of Colorado, hereby issue this Executive Order creating the Governor's Child Welfare Action Committee ("Committee").

#### **I. Background and Purpose**

The protection of children from abuse and neglect must be one of Colorado's highest public policy priorities. It is our responsibility to assure that Colorado's youngest citizens have the opportunity to be safe and nurtured and to achieve their full potential. If even one child dies due to neglect or abuse it is one too many. We must commit ourselves to continually improving our child welfare system, assuring that efforts are made to better assess and serve this at risk population of children and their families.

To put our care of vulnerable children in context, it is important to look at the numbers of families that are currently involved in the child welfare system:

- In 2007 the child welfare system received 70,216 referrals for abuse and neglect;
- Of those, 57,545 cases were opened for assessment; and
- Of those assessed, 41,536 cases were opened by the county departments for full review.

A spike in the number of child fatalities statewide led to the Colorado Department of Human Services' recent review of child fatalities due to child abuse or neglect. This review identified several ways in which Colorado's child welfare system can be improved. My administration is taking steps to immediately implement many of these necessary improvements. This review also identified issues that will involve longer term planning and solutions.

The protection of children in Colorado is the responsibility of many parties including parents, relatives, neighbors, foster parents, schools, law enforcement, courts, providers,

guardians *ad litem*, and many other organizations within each of Colorado's communities. In Colorado we have a public social service system that is "state supervised and county administered." This means that both the state and county departments of human services provide vital services to children and families in need. The county departments directly provide the services that aid children and families everyday. The State department provides the supervision and oversight to the counties as they administer the child welfare programs. This dual system creates challenges in assuring that there is consistency across counties in decision making, supervision, and training in human service offices. It is this same system, however, that allows each individual county to specifically tailor assistance to meet the needs of their community.

It is urgent that we examine the State's child welfare system so that we can better protect children from abuse and neglect. We also need to enhance the public confidence in the child welfare system. The system must be more transparent in order to provide assurance to the public that when they have concerns about a child's well being and they report these concerns to authorities that the situation will be responded to in a timely manner by highly trained professionals.

## II. Mission and Scope

The mission of the Governor's Child Welfare Action Committee shall be to provide recommendations to the Governor on how to improve the Colorado Child Welfare System. The Committee must be guided by data and must rely upon evidence of best practices when available. The ultimate goal will be to reduce the neglect, injury, and fatality rates for Colorado's children. I am establishing this Committee for eighteen months. It is expected that the committee will make policy, budgetary, and legislative recommendations.

The Committee's work shall include, but not be limited to:

- A. Analyzing state-county organizational capacity and structure to determine whether this system is the most effective option for protecting children:
  1. Define the role of the Colorado Department of Human Services in monitoring, oversight, consultation, and technical assistance with child welfare staff in county departments of social/human services;
  2. Consider an array of progressive incentives and sanctions to be utilized with county departments and providers to assure they are in compliance with legal rules and regulations;
  3. Assess county workload, caseload and staffing levels to determine what level of resources are required to ensure the safety of children; and

4. Investigate child welfare models throughout the country and whether there are other organizational structures that would better ensure the safety of Colorado's children.

B. Examining the quality and quantity of training that child care professionals should receive when working in the child protection field:

1. Define basic qualifications and training requirements for staff and supervisors who are part of the state-county funded child welfare system;

2. Consider the benefits of a worker certification program for child welfare workers and supervisors; and

3. Consider the efficacy, cost and benefits of a State Training Academy for Child Protection.

C. Evaluating public access to state-county human services departments:

1. Assess how human services agencies can be more accessible and responsive to community members who want to report child maltreatment; and

2. Make recommendations for systems, protocols, and programming that allow the public to make reports more easily and to develop a tracking system in which citizens can be assured that their concerns will be followed up in a responsible and timely manner.

D. Exploring the role that independent oversight committees can play in ensuring that human service agencies are held accountable for actions that might negatively impact families, children, and the community at large:

1. Evaluate the effectiveness of agencies like the Child Ombudsman Office in which an independent body is authorized to intervene when an agency's action or inaction may be placing a child at risk;

E. Developing recommendations as to how public/private partnerships can improve the services and care provided to children who reside within the welfare system:

1. Develop forums that encourage state agencies and divisions to collaborate across systems to improve child welfare resources and practice. These departments should include but be not limited to the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment and

the Colorado Department of Health Care Policy and Financing, as well as the Judicial Branch; and

2. Include business partners from the private sector who serve families in a wide array of programs. These individuals should bring expertise on how to change and improve business practices by incorporating effective management skills and efficiency methodologies.

- F. Reviewing evidence-based best practice standards to the extent practicable when recommending changes to the child welfare system.

### III. Membership

The Committee shall be composed, as follows:

- A. The Committee shall consist of up to twenty-five (25) voting members who shall be appointed by and serve at the pleasure of the Governor.
- B. The following individuals shall serve as members of the Committee:
  1. The Executive Director of the Department of Human Services, who shall serve as chair of the Committee;
  2. The Executive Director of the Department of Public Health and Environment, or his designee; and
  3. The Executive Director of the Department of Health Care Policy and Financing, or her designee;
- C. Other members of the Committee shall include:
  1. County commissioners and county social services representatives;
  2. Individuals with judicial experience;
  3. Individuals with experience in early childhood development and/or K-12 educational representatives;
  4. Children's representatives serving in a private or non-profit entity dedicated to the protection of children;
  5. Families or children who are current and/or former recipients of child welfare services in Colorado; and

6. Members from the business community who bring management and business planning experience.
- D. The Committee shall be appointed to assure broad-based regional, ethnic, and professional distribution of membership.
- E. The Committee shall meet regularly at the direction and discretion of the chair.
- F. The Committee may establish working groups or subcommittees from within its membership or outside its membership to assist it in its work or to address specific issues.

#### IV. Directives

The Governor's Child Welfare Action Committee is hereby created. The Committee shall prepare and submit to the Governor an interim and a final report. The interim report shall be submitted by October 31, 2008, and a final report shall be submitted by December 31, 2009. In its interim report, the Committee shall report on its progress and, to the extent that any recommendations are finalized, make its recommendations regarding any policy changes, including but not limited to recommendations for legislative changes. In its final report, the Committee shall make its final recommendations regarding any policy changes, including but not limited to recommendations for legislative changes. The Committee shall make every effort to reach consensus on its interim and final reports. Recommendations contained in the Committee's reports shall only be adopted upon a two-thirds vote of the Committee members.

#### V. Staffing and Resources

The Committee shall have the power to accept money and in-kind contributions from public and private entities, but only to the extent such donations are necessary to cover its expenses. These donated funds may be used for the purpose of providing administrative support for the Committee, which may include retaining a consultant to assist with the Committee's work, as well as paying for the Committee's actual expenses. Any money contributed to the Committee shall be directed to the Office of the Governor and deposited with the Treasurer of the State of Colorado in an account within the Office of the Governor's budget. Members of the Committee shall serve without compensation, but may, at the discretion of the co-chairs and upon the approval of the Office of the Governor, be reimbursed for any actual expenses incurred.

VI. Duration

This Executive Order shall remain in force until December 31, 2009, at which time the Committee shall be dissolved.

GIVEN under my hand and the  
Executive Seal of the State of  
Colorado this sixteenth day of  
April, 2008.

Bill Ritter, Jr.  
Governor