

\*House Committee\*

## **COMMITTEE MINUTES for GOVERNMENT OVERSIGHT**

Date: ***June 5, 2017***

Location: ***RM 116***

Convened: ***9:00 AM***

Adjourned: ***3:10 PM***

Attendance Roll Call:

Present: Representatives Kaufmann-CH, Heartsill-VC, Finkenauer-RM,  
Heaton, Lensing, Thede, Windschitl, Wolfe

Absent:

Excused: Representative Pettengill

The joint Government Oversight was called to order at 9:00 AM.

Roll was taken, 13 Members were present, one Member was excused (Rep. Pettengill)

Co-Chair Representative Kaufmann gave opening remarks.

Co-Chair Senator Breitbach gave opening remarks.

Co-Chair Kaufmann introduced the first speakers on the agenda. A Point Of Order was raised by Ranking Member Senator McCoy that typically the Ranking Members were afforded an opportunity to give opening remarks.

Ranking Member Senator McCoy gave opening comments.

Ranking Member Representative Finkenauer gave opening comments.

Co-Chair Kaufmann introduced Wendy Rickman, Division Administrator of Adult Children and

Family Services with Iowa Department of Human Services and Vern Armstrong, Division

Administrator of Field Operations with Iowa Department of Human Services. Both gave an overview of their duties and presented on:

- \*Foster care process

- \*Adoption process

- \*Field investigation process

- \*Staffing levels, caseload

- \*Differential response review

- \*Third party review

Questions and answers were given for clarification, including:

- \*Duties and qualifications of both Social Worker 2's and 3's (experience, licensure, caseloads, etc.)

- \*Accepted and rejected intakes

- \*Who are the contracted parties and what were their duties/involvement

- \*Foster adoption process

- \*Role of DHS once adoption finalized

- \*Incentive payments (including explanation of performance payments)

- \*Emergency removal and family placement options

The conversation continued with DHS representatives regarding:

- \*Special needs adoptions and the trajectory of those adoptions then being home-schooled –

removing the safety net that educators provide

- \*Qualifications for special needs adoptions

- \*Data availability tracking cases of Child in Need of Assistance (CINA) who were

then

home-schooled

A short break was taken at 11:00 AM.

Co-Chair Kaufmann next introduced Lance Heeren, Assistant Linn County Attorney and

Andrea Vitzthum, Assistant Polk County Attorney.

Mr. Heeren gave presented on his involvement with DHS, the receipt of rejected intakes,

percentage of cases he receives, the checks and balances in place, etc. He also mentioned that

the family assessment reports are not given to the County Attorneys unless they are adjudicated

Child In Need of Assistance (CHINA).

Ms. Vitzthum then gave an overview of her role as it pertained to DHS and the Polk County

Attorney's office. She informed the body that the hearings held are open to the public. DHS

workers expressed what she referred to as vicarious trauma and there was not adequate debriefing after a death. She also discussed the turnover rate of social workers and lack of

adequate funding.

Questions and answers were given, including:

- \*Foster care licensing

- \*County attorneys access to rejected reports, but no ability to read all of them because of the volume.

At 11:30 AM Co-Chair Kaufmann announced the committee would now break and return in 30 minutes.

The meeting resumed at 12:05 PM.

Co-Chair Kaufmann informed Members that DHS presenters would re-join the discussion and there were 60 minutes allotted in which to complete their questioning of DHS officials.

Some items discussed during this time included:

- \*When a child is removed from a home, how often is drug use a factor.

- \*Methods of drug testing, etc.

- \*Continued subsidy payments when children were no longer cared for.

- \*New abuse referral

- \*Training for social workers including follow up, etc.

- \*Supervisors' role

- \*Continued monitoring after adoption-would that take legislative action or DHS policy change?

- \*Contractors and subcontracting

- \*Recording and retention of calls to centralized intake

- \*Review of DHS by another party (Alabama)

- \*Risk factor assessments

At 12:55 PM a Point Of Order called by Co-Chair Kaufmann that members had exceeded the time limit for questions.

At 1:00 PM the Judicial Process Overview continued with guest speaker District Associate Judge Colin J. Witt

The discussion included:

- \*Placement process

- \*Filing of petitions for removal

- \*Hearings and time frames

- \*Relative placement

- \*Guardians ad Litem

- \*In-camera hearings with children

\*Court appointed special advocates (CASA)

\*Out of state placement

1:40 PM Co-Chair Kaufmann introduced Abby Patterson, Child Abuse Prevention Program Coordinator. Ms. Patterson provided a program overview of their services. Questions were asked regarding how Iowa compares with other states and the decision of combining services that were previously separate, etc.

1:50 PM Co-Chair Kaufmann introduced Sheriff Steve Hoffman, Marshall County and Police Chief Jeff Hanson, Spirit Lake Police Department.

Both presented overviews of their involvement as it pertained with DHS and the criminal

aspect of calls received. While some ran parallel to each other, others did not.

Questions and answers were given, including:

\*Were older children treated differently

\*Reason for denial – from a law enforcement perspective

\*Although DHS denial – could law enforcement proceed, circumstances surrounding

\*Drug testing by DHS and potential for criminal follow-up

\*Suggested changes, especially pertaining to 24 hour mandatory follow up by DHS

\*Encouragement for everyone to listen to DHS workers without fear of repercussions

\*Good working relationship with DHS overall

2:20 PM Co-Chair Kaufmann introduced Scott Woodruff, Home School Legal

Defense Association. A handout was provided to the members of the committee.

Discussion continued on some statistical information within that booklet. One point included the top recommendation to look at risk factors – if there had been a previous allegation – that should be

taken into consideration prior to further involvement for placement. During the question and answer a Point Of Order was called by Representative Heaton asking to “rephrase language of two girls murdered” pointing out that at no time was information presented that murders had occurred.

Discussion continued with respect to home schooling, safety nets in place for those, and that a

“muscle” policy needs to be in place. Truancy reports and denial of home schooling were

discussed as well.

At 2:55 PM closing remarks were given by Ranking Member Representative Finkenauer, Ranking Member Senator McCoy, Co-Chair Senator Breitbach and Co-Chair Representative Kaufmann.

A motion made to adjourn the meeting by Representative Heartsill.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:11 PM.

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Representative Bobby Kaufmann

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Sarah Vanderploeg, Committee Secretary