

## **Social Services Regional Supervision and Collaboration Working Group Meeting Minutes – 10.04.2018**

The fourteenth meeting of the Social Services Regional Supervision and Collaboration Working Group (SSWG) was hosted by the University of North Carolina School of Government (UNC SOG) on October 04, 2018. A recording of the meeting can be found at [https://www.sog.unc.edu/SSWG\\_meeting10](https://www.sog.unc.edu/SSWG_meeting10).

### **Working Group Members In Attendance**

Sen. Tamara Barringer, co-chair

Rep. Sarah Stevens, co-chair

Sen. Joyce Krawiec

Hon. Page Lemel, Commissioner, Transylvania County

Hon. Kevin Austin, Commissioner, Yadkin County

Hon. Robert Stiehl, Chief District Court Judge, Cumberland County

Glenn Osborne, Social Services Director, Wilson County

Lisa Cauley, Chief, Child Welfare Section of the Division of Social Services, DHHS

Angie Stephenson, DSS Attorney, Orange and Chatham Counties

Susan Osborne, Social Services Director, Alamance County

Hon. Brenda Howerton, Commissioner, Durham County

### **Working Group Members Participating Remotely**

Susan Perry-Manning, Deputy Secretary for Human Services, DHHS

### **Working Group Members Not in Attendance**

Rep. David Lewis

Rep. Jonathan Jordan

Sen. Kathy Harrington

Hon. Bob Woodard, Commissioner, Dare County

Michael Becketts, Assistant Secretary for Human Services, DHHS

Chris Dobbins, Consolidated Human Services Director, Gaston County

### **Convene**

- Welcoming remarks by the Co-Chairs
  - Rep. Stevens and Sen. Barringer welcomed SSWG members and thanked them for their continued commitment to this important work, especially now after the devastating impact of Hurricane Florence on many North Carolina counties.
  - Sen. Barringer offered appreciation for the support given to counties during the aftermath of Hurricane Florence by Secretary Cohen, M. Becketts and DHHS, especially in the coordination of housing placement for out-of-state Red Cross volunteers.

- Introductions of the SSWG members, SOG support staff, and meeting attendees.
- M. Henderson reviewed the meeting agenda.
- K. Austin moved to approve the minutes from the September 4, 2018 meeting, seconded by Sen. Krawiec.
  - K. Austin moved to amend the minutes to reflect he attended the meeting remotely.
  - Sen. Krawiec moved to amend the minutes to reflect she attended the meeting remotely.
  - Meeting minutes were approved as amended unanimously.

### **Discussion with the Center for the Support of Families**

- SSWG members were asked to offer feedback and ask questions about the findings and recommendations in CSF’s preliminary report. CSF’s preliminary report can be found at <https://www.osbm.nc.gov/social-services-and-child-welfare-reform-reports>; a recording of CSF’s preliminary report presentation (September 5, 2018) can be found at <https://www.sog.unc.edu/resources/microsites/social-services/meeting-minutes-and-recordings>.
  - Feedback and questions from SSWG members regarding the **Social Services Preliminary Reform Plan**:
    - A SSWG member questioned CSF staff about cost estimates for staffing recommendations in the report.
      - CSF reported they used salary ranges from a survey of North Carolina counties in developing the staffing salary recommendations; Noted CSF is awaiting feedback from some counties concerning their current staffing and salary structures.
        - CSF’s salary recommendations for the report’s recommended seven regional offices are set out in p.60 of the preliminary report.
        - CSF noted that not all of the recommended positions will truly be new positions, as some DHHS staff are currently responsible for regional tasks and will be moved to the regional structure. Other staff may also be transitioned into regional roles.
      - CSF noted the issue of disparity in salary levels by county that complicates regional staffing, with some counties being able to draw the most qualified, experience workforce over state positions.
      - Rep. Stevens raised concern for the regional structure being an unintended added level of state government and that the added costs may trend towards an eventual state administered system.
        - CSF reported that they spoke to county and central offices that supported a regional structure that offers support to

counties by offering needed expertise and creating consistency among county administration.

- Sen. Barringer noted that the goal of the regional structure is to offer tailored support and guidance to counties, and create a deliberate regional staffing structure with that goal in mind.
- A SSWG member questioned CSF regarding the placement of metro counties.
  - CSF clarified that the preliminary report recommends a minimum of seven regional offices as the SSWG Stage One Report recommended five to seven regional offices, with some consideration given to grouping the largest, urban areas together based on the commonality of their social service needs.
  - A SSWG member questioned the ability to recruit quality staff for seven regional offices; Preference may be for fewer regional offices where recruiting quality, experienced staffing could be more practical.
  - G. Osborne commented that he plans to submit additional feedback to CSF; members asked him to highlight the comments he plans to submit to CSF:
    - Believes the seven office regional structure would be supported by directors provided the quality staffing and salary structure issues are tackled.
    - Agrees that social services board members (regardless of county structure) need more training on the programs, functionality and funding sources for social services.
    - Agrees that continuous quality improvement is necessary, but pointed out the preliminary report is silent on a bottom-up approach. Believes recognition is needed for counties' current good works with statewide dissemination of successful approaches.
    - Believes CSF should incorporate trauma informed practice as part of NC child welfare practice model, similar to Wilson County's Signs of Safety Model.
  - S. Perry-Manning, participating remotely, commented (read to the group by A. Wall):
    - DHHS does already have staff who are home-based and regionally assigned.
    - DHHS is continuing to identify how to realign existing staff resources to this effort but do anticipate the need for additional resources to provide the level and quality of support counties need to meet performance goals.
    - DHHS agrees that the goal is not to set up a new layer of bureaucracy, but instead organize our resources, support and monitoring to have more boots on the ground closer

- and more accessible to the communities they are responsible for supporting.
  - DHHS is responsible for responding to both the Phase 1 SSWG recommendations and the CSF recommendations regarding regional support services in a legislative report on November 15, and are working on it now.
    - Sen. Barringer noted this report will give the SSWG an idea of the agency's stance on regional support services which will be beneficial to the group's work.
- Feedback and questions from SSWG members regarding the **Child Welfare Preliminary Reform Plan**:
  - Judge Stiehl asked if CSF felt comfortable that all stakeholders had a voice in their process for developing the preliminary report's recommendations.
    - CSF explained that they met with stakeholders including social services clients (relative caregivers, foster kids, and foster parents) in three parts of the state (Morehead City, Spindale, and High Point) from March to August.
    - Noted that CSF limited invitations to the July 9 and 10 meeting to county and state leaders in order to facilitate a more open discussion as CSF reported on what they had found as best practices and concerns in child welfare services across the state. CSF noted they plan to now broaden stakeholder feedback with a similar meeting with child placing agencies and judicial officials.
    - CSF conducted three child welfare surveys: foster care workers and supervisors, CPS workers and supervisors, and the DHHS Child Welfare Section.
    - CSF plans to meet with County Directors' Association, County Commissioners' Association, OSBM, and DHHS to gather more county data before CSF submits their final report.
      - CSF asked for SSWG members to offer other options to recover from and encourage counties to share their staffing information and other feedback with CSF.
      - A Stephenson asked CSF to include county attorney information as well.
  - A SSWG member asked whether CSF has any experience in incorporating regional; CSF did not address.
  - G. Osborne inquired about whether the final report will include recommendations on implementing the new federal Family First Prevention Services Act that was recently enacted.
    - CSF addressed the challenges of capacity issues and the need to for discipline to focus on methodical short term goals to accomplish comprehensive reform here.

- SSWG members agreed to share any additional feedback concerning CSF’s preliminary report later submitted to CSF with the SSWG. If any, these comments will be posted on the microsite before the next SSWG meeting.
  - SSWG members can send additional feedback and questions to CSF by emailing Vernon Drew at [vdrew@sligov.com](mailto:vdrew@sligov.com).
  - Reminded that CSF’s final report is due in February.

### **Review SSWG Criteria**

- M. Henderson asked SSWG members to review and edit the criteria the SSWG developed at the September 04, 2018, meeting for inter-county collaboration recommendations. The criteria can be viewed on the October 4, 2018 agenda, which can be found at <https://www.sog.unc.edu/resources/microsites/social-services/materials>.
- SSWG members asked to edit the criteria by:
  - Integrating the idea of consistent best practices and continuous quality improvement with a valued bottom-up approach.
    - Edit the “Foster more comprehensive, ongoing collaborations” criteria point to add “that exemplify cooperative effort towards best practices.”
  - Adding the three guiding principles used to develop Rylan’s law: transparency, accountability, and high quality across all counties.

### **SSWG Recommendations for inter-county collaboration**

- SSWG members were asked to review the first draft of the SSWG recommendations for inter-county collaboration with SSWG member comments integrated (“homework” for this meeting). Members were also asked to review the handouts profiling Eastern NC Collaborations (note: the gathering of these profiles was interrupted by Hurricane Florence and will resume later) and Surry/Stokes Foster Care Licensing collaboration. Both the draft SSWG inter-county collaboration recommendations with SSWG member comments and the collaboration profiles are available on the microsite at <https://www.sog.unc.edu/resources/microsites/social-services/materials>.
- A. Wall reported to the SSWG that, at the request of the SSWG at the September 04, 2018, meeting, AOC staff will be present at the October 16, 2018, SSWG meeting to answer SSWG member questions.

### **Debrief highlights of small group discussions**

- SSWG members were asked to meet at their tables in small groups to discuss edits to the preliminary inter-county collaboration recommendations, as well as ideas that should be added to the recommendation rationales. The following are highlights of the small group discussions. Note: the comments below follow the number/lettering of the draft recommendations.
  - 1. Conflicts of Interest**
    - a. Edit to begin the recommendation with a statement that counties in the region are encouraged to resolve COIs immediately amongst themselves.

- i. Add to the recommendation rationale that legal timelines are involved (supporting “immediately”) and that it is not appropriate to interfere with counties’ spirit of cooperation.
- ii. Add that a uniform statewide series of definitions of what clearly constitutes a COI should be developed by DHHS legal with the cooperation of county level legal.
- iii. Add that a procedure to initiate regional contact with clear points of contact and assumption of responsibilities should be developed.
  - 1. Add that one person should be charged with COI decision making responsibility at the regional level when a conflict among counties exists and cannot be mutually resolved.
  - 2. Noted that though it is important that counties be free to negotiate COIs but there should be a notification requirement enabling the regional office to record COIs and resolutions.
  - 3. Designation of the Regional Director as COI decision maker when counties cannot resolve, with a state/central DHHS employee as the final arbiter where conflict exists between regions.
  - 4. Enabling legislation is needed to designate and grant authority making DHHS as the ultimate arbiter.
- iv. Add that information sharing should be maintained at the regional or state level with statewide dissemination of COI best practices.
- v. Add that there is a need for the state to develop a resolution for fiscal responsibility if an agreement cannot be reached between the counties.
  - 1. Focus on receiving counties for foster care and adoption.
  - 2. Address extraordinary circumstances and legal prosecution.
- b. No changes.
- c. No changes.
- d. SSWG determined that if possible, recommendations 1a, 1b, and 1c should be dealt with by policy; however, enabling legislation is needed that designates DHHS as the ultimate arbiter of COI resolutions under recommendation 1a.

## **2. Inter-County Movement of Clients**

- a. Agree with recommendation for legislative change to update the definition of *residency* in GS 153A-257. Add recommendation for a legislative study of related issues concerning revising residency, including scope, current practices, APS specific residency, and Medicaid complications.
- b. Edit to include recommendation for legislation that specifies rules for venue for APS, with CPS venue statutes being instructive in their drafting.
- c. No changes.
- d. SSWG wants to hear more from Medicaid Transformation expert. Decided that it is more appropriate to flag this issue as a high priority in the SSWG report and mandate that the Medicaid Transformation Team considers

changes needed to Medicaid eligibility policies and practices to improve accessibility of Medicaid-funded services across county lines as the transformation moves forward.

- e. Edit to include recommendation for default cost share formula and a regional decision maker/assistance for cost sharing.
  - i. Add that over an hour drive/60 miles from primary county office to primary county office should be expensed.
- f. Deferred until after AOC can come to answer questions at the next SSWG meeting. SSWG comments on this recommendation included:
  - i. Importance of learning costs and feasibility of remote participation.
  - ii. Expediency remains the main goal/rationale.
  - iii. Importance of accounting for different forms of participation.
  - iv. Expand to include a legislative study of feasible technological solutions regarding access to court proceedings and constitutional rights.
  - v. Need enabling legislation for social workers to be able to use the phone with an incarcerated parent or other respondent party.

### **3. Information Sharing**

- a. Need input from AOC at next SSWG meeting.
- b. Agree with recommendation for confidentiality laws to be reviewed and revised to allow child welfare and child support local staff involved with a particular child or family to share information, if permitted by federal confidentiality laws.
  - i. Noted that AOC is developing new technology that will offer expanded access, but it is not available at this time.
    - 1. AOC understands the importance of statewide access to electronic filing for social services attorneys, but resource constraints prevent the retrofitting of J Wise to accommodate this need.
- c. Agree with recommendation that state laws governing guardianship should be amended to direct clerks to provide notice to a director of any hearing in which the director may be appointed guardian. Group recommended 30 days notice because the director needs sufficient time to gather information about the case and identify other possible guardians. DSS is expected to be the guardian of last resort.
- d. Add recommendation for legislation to study confidentiality laws.

### **4. Other Recommendations**

- a. Edit recommendation to read “DHHS should develop consistent programs and policies to improve workforce development and training for county directors.”
  - i. Key rationale should include the importance of director training *before* they become directors, with the Directors Academy as a good start. Noted the need for top-down training, such as with practice

- models, where directors are aligned and understand the concepts and model steps just as much as workers.
- ii. Include that director orientation, training, and coaching components are needed.
- b. No single solution here; more study is necessary.
- i. Issues noted with caseload based staffing due to day-to-day fluctuation with added complication of workforce scarcity.
  - ii. Idea floated of social services fellows program. Issue with funding adequate staffing beyond county property taxes, and the need for the state to shoulder some of the funding.
  - iii. One option provided by SSWG is to have the regional office have a pool of caseworkers (referred to as “overflow capacity” in Stage One) to shuffle around the region based on caseload, which would be funded by DHHS.
  - iv. Need to address staffing funding without a massive outlay of counties; would be helpful for a study just on this topic in the future to develop recommendations.
    - 1. Possible need for re-basing current funding to level playing field among counties.
    - 2. Need state, regional and local input on this recommendation.
  - v. Edit the recommendation: 1) Regional staff must study needs and capacity in their counties; 2) Regional office needs to have staffing capability to meet surge capacity needs with counties in great need; (3) Recommend a study with legislative, county and management DHHS officials to evaluate staffing funding and make recommendations on this topic.
- c. Edit recommendation to mirror rationale: emphasizing that DHHS should increase the quantity, quality, accessibility and *consistency* of training provided to county staff.
- d. Edit to include stakeholders (judges, commissioners, other board members etc.) in definition of *counties*.
- e. Asked to incorporate the SSWG comments (below rationale) to be combined and included in the rationale for this recommendation.
- f. SSWG small group discussed that this is a lower priority and should not be recommended by the SSWG; SSWG full group agrees.
- g. No changes needed.
- i. Noted that this is a similar recommendation to that included in Stage One.

### **Review next steps, closing comments**

- The next SSWG meeting will be October 16, 2018.
  - AOC will be present to answer questions from the group.



- The group will review and finalize the revised collaboration recommendations and then begin discussing regional administration.
- Discussed the upcoming meeting schedule:
  - October 16
  - November 8
  - November 20
  - December 11
  - December 20

**Adjourn**