

Social Services Working Group Stage Two Information Gathering

The work of the Social Services Regional Supervision and Collaboration Working (SSWG) is divided into two stages. In Stage Two, the SSWG is charged with

- Developing recommendations regarding legislative and regulatory changes necessary to improve collaboration between counties in the administration of social services programs and services. The recommendations must address, at a minimum, information sharing, conflicts of interest, and inter-county movement of people enrolled in programs or receiving social services.
- Developing a vision for transitioning the State from a county-administered system to a regionally-administered system. The vision must identify general benefits and challenges associated with making such a transition.

In order to prepare the SSWG for this Stage Two work, the SOG support team scheduled a series of meetings and discussion groups to gather feedback from relevant partners and stakeholders involved with the social services system. Groups involved in this process included:

- Social services directors
- Social services attorneys
- Social services board members
- County commissioners
- State agency representatives
- Parent attorney representatives
- Behavioral health provider organization
- NC Pediatric Society
- National Association of Social Workers (NC)
- Prevent Child Abuse
- NC Partnership to Address Adult Abuse

SOG also posted a public survey on the SOG website and shared the link with many individuals and groups. It is still open and available at

<https://www.sog.unc.edu/resources/microsites/social-services/stage-two-public-survey>.

SOG asked each group “what does SSWG need to know?” and posed variations on these two questions:

- What legislative and regulatory changes are needed to improve inter-county collaboration?
- What benefits and challenges might be associated with a state-supervised, regionally-administered (as opposed to a state-supervised, county-administered) social services system?

Below is a synthesis of the feedback SOG received about the second issue – regional administration. We have also included relevant comments from the DSS director survey. Responses from the public survey are provided in a separate document.

Regional Administration: What are potential benefits or challenges associated with shifting to a system of regional, rather than county, administration?

Potential Benefits

Recurring: Possible benefits identified by multiple individuals

Generate more consistency in practice and policy interpretation

Stabilize staffing; there would be no reason to move to another county because pay/benefits would be more consistent.

Can learn from experience with LME transition to regions; may be able to avoid same pitfalls or challenges

Easier for the state to supervise fewer entities; fewer MOU's to track

Create economies of scale

Smaller counties could benefit from larger counties

Alignment with other key maps to the extent possibly (judicial districts; LME's; regional supervision, etc.) could improve service

Improve accountability

Decrease influence of local politics (note: perceived as a potential benefit or a challenge, depending on situation)

Potential to regionalize foster care resources; identify more options for placement.

Non-recurring: Other possible benefits identified

Opportunity to increase state support so that services are more consistent across the state; for example, APS may receive more support than it currently does

Regions may be better able to communicate/message with decision-makers and public

Better able to deploy staff across the region, particularly for those staff with a specific expertise or for programs with relatively few clients

More options for support in urgent/intensive situations, such as when there is a child fatality.

Create more consistent training

Potential Challenges

Recurring: Possible challenges identified by multiple individuals

Anxiety generated by the change process at the individual, organizational, and community levels

Designing the funding formula at the county level; county contribution

Redefining the cost-sharing and funding draw down

Loss of individual county identities, local relationships and personal touch; local flexibility; convenient or familiar service sites;

Difficult to manage diverse resources and philosophies across counties within the region

Association with the negative outcomes generated by mental health reform (LME/MCOs)

“Ownership” of the new regional authority; the role of the counties vs. the new entity vs. the state

Non-recurring: Other possible challenges identified

Uncertainty about legal representation for regional entities

Potential to have multiple judicial districts in one region

Regions will not be equal in size, population, service needs, etc. across the state, which could lead to imbalance in resource allocation or support from the state

If larger counties are in a region with smaller counties, the smaller ones may receive less attention and/or support

Difficult to design local “ownership” into the regional authority

Concern about county liability exposure if a region fails

Geographical proximity might not be the best criteria to use in defining regions; could use other similarities (such as population) to bond counties into a non-contiguous region

Selected Comments about Regional Administration

DSS Director Survey (May 2018)

- Just advice, it seems that we are always re-inventing the wheel, why don't we focus on just fixing what we have, rather than feeling the need to change everything. I have been a DSS Director for over 10 years and I have known nothing but change, not always change for the good. As we all know, NCFAST has created great difficulty for county social services, evident if you look at how well NC did before the system change. NCFAST is the elephant in the room, why are we in denial? I want the best for our community families, that is what it is all about, give us the tools that we need to do our job, fix NCFAST.
- Regional Supervision would work fine as long as staff were competent. Regional DSS' would not work well just as mental health reform did not work well and still does not to this day. The problem is supervision, not being able to hire qualified staff and keep them. The job is hard and the pay is not equal among counties which causes turnover. The job is dangerous and there is a lack of folks wanting to do social work in social services.
- Just be sure to look at what has happened in mental health, we don't want a repeat. On the other hand, our regional offices of years ago, especially the one in Greenville, because that's the one I went to, worked great. So, if we can pattern them after that model it would be great and you don't have to reinvent the wheel, so to speak.
- Regionalizing critical services that DSS provides would take local services out of the control of the county. DSS clients rely on our safety net. Money should go to supporting services not high dollar salaries that have occurred in mental health. Local staff know the clients and resources within the county. A regional system makes no sense.
- I am strongly in opposition to a regionalized social services delivery system. This would be detrimental to smaller communities who already struggle with lack of resources and transportation issues. If a regional system needs to make cuts or concessions, I believe it will be the rural communities who will suffer the most.
- Regional offices where oversight is provided to more than one county would not be productive. Regardless of what policies or protocols are put into place all counties would not receive the same level of attention or supervision. The state would not provide adequate oversight to the regional offices, unless something changes with the state. Regional offices that offer support, such as they were in years past, would be a great resources. One of the major issues we experience now is getting guidance and support that we need. Many of the issues that counties are facing now are not because of issues at the county level, it is because the state has taken away supportive resources, such as reducing the number of program consultants, restricting their travel to counties, putting so many staff resources into NC FAST, which has created more financial waste than any project possibly could. More and more unfunded mandates from the state, without additional resources have contributed to county problems. The state resolves many of their budget issues by pushing down the cost to the county.
- It seems that by creating regional DSS offices you are creating big government and taking the funding decisions and service provider decisions from the county and county taxpayers

that are funding social service agencies. Is there a thought that regional social services will be funded by the state instead of the county?

- Regional administration is a scary prospect for many reasons. A large reason is funding and how that will work. If Counties understood that first it may help in acceptance of the change from top officials.
- Local Folks know the most about the resources and opportunities available and needed in their counties. Local buy in is crucial to success for local residents.
- I think regional administration should be voluntary and determined by the specific needs of the counties desiring to partner. The funding and board representation and communication would be part of the process to be designed at that point. There are points to be made for both options. There are also strong reasons to stay as we are for many counties.