



**MEMORANDUM
COUNTY OF ERIE
DEPT. OF SOCIAL SERVICES**

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TO: Erie County Legislature
FROM: Carol Dankert-Maurer, Commissioner
DATE: June 10, 2014
RE: Initiatives to Support Child Protective Services

To better inform your honorable body about the steps we have taken in the last year to improve Child Protective Services, please find below the initiatives we have completed or are in the process of completing:

Engaging the Community

ECDSS Leadership has:

- In conjunction with Catholic Charities and Say Yes Buffalo, placed 14 Site Facilitators in high needs City of Buffalo schools to help children at-risk for child welfare or juvenile justice.
- Engaged with Casey Family Programs on 3 different initiatives important to the future well-being of children and the services community of Erie County:
 - 1) Improving local best practice in kinship parenting (“Kin Competence”),
 - 2) Establishing a strong community participation structure to coordinate with the large number of agencies dedicated to safe children and sustaining families,
 - 3) Aligning with the emerging national strategy of a public health model for addressing child abuse, poverty and youth development.
- Engaged local foundation to discuss funding a community initiative to encourage young single mothers to choose better partners and caretakers for their children.
- Negotiated an agreement with Kaleida Health and the Catholic Health System to place Child Protective Workers in hospitals with a significant number of reports to the State Central Register.
- DSS leadership commenced agency based meetings between Social Services leadership and local agencies to improve coordination and partnership opportunities.
- Worked with the County Legislature to re-establish its stakeholder group, the Erie County Community Coordinating Council for Children and Families.
- Studies Montgomery County, Maryland, to review a working model of community participation and engagement in safe community strategies.

- Worked with the International Institute of Buffalo to improve service delivery for refugees and victims of human trafficking.
- Worked with the Family Court to improve coordination of family services, and improve efficiencies in work accomplished together.
- Developed and delivered two Community Café dialogues focused on safe sleeping practices, Shaken Baby Syndrome, and community best practices for assuring safe children. Over 120 persons attended these 2 sessions in April
- Issued an RFP for co-location of Domestic Violence Advocates with Child Protective Services with negotiations for award underway. Contract negotiations are in process.

More and reconfigured staffing:

ECDSS Leadership with the support of the County Executive has:

- Worked with Erie County Personnel and Labor Relations to schedule needed civil service exams for CPS Caseworker and supervisor titles and then to secure local determination of scheduling consistent with need going forward.
- Added a total of 18 positions (three teams) to Child Protective Services.
- With the support of the Legislature added 6 part-time positions filled with retired Child Protective Workers.
- Reconfigured and enhanced the serious injury and sex abuse teams.
- Discontinued the Family Assessment Response (FAR) team and reinvested in traditional investigative cases.
- Directed that supervisory staff is to conduct more direct work on CPS cases.
- Worked closely with CSEA to allow retirees to return part-time to CPS positions, and have other workers trained in child protective services perform such work.
- Rotated additional attorneys to support CPS staff.
- Appointed Quality Assurance Coordinator to review CPS cases and to identify systemic opportunities to improve practice.
- Completed the hiring of senior staff as part of a reorganization of management duties at the highest level of the department. The third management position was finally added in March. Since March we have also been without one of our senior managers due to retirement.
- Requested OCFS provide direct assistance to manage caseload. Request denied.
- Requested OCFS provide additional dollars to offset increased staffing request. Request pending.
- Submitted proposal to the Administration and County Legislature for additional CPS staff.

Improved policies and procedures

ECDSS CPS Leadership has:

- Required that each CPS Caseworker and Team Leader has an individualized work plan to improve the skills and work of child protective workers and supervisors.
- Established several tracking tools and monitoring reports to allow Teams Leaders and Coordinators to follow performance and productivity to support consistent and quality casework while managing the business of a large work unit with public accountabilities.

- The several OCFS Corrective Action Plans aligned with management reports developed by ECDSS have formed the basis of the ECDSS CPS Quality Assurance/Quality Improvement Plan now in implementation phase.
- Partnered with Erie County Department of Central Police Services to train caseworkers to improve interviewing skills
- Reissued the following policies and procedures:
 - Chronic Neglect Policy
 - 911 Police Call Procedure
 - Clinical Referral Form
 - Collateral Contact Verification
 - 48-Hour Progress Note Requirement
- Developed and implemented social media policies as a means to gathering information during a CPS investigation
- Instituted a temporary overtime strategy:
 - Allowed workers to work overtime from home
 - Overtime opportunities expanded to all persons with CPS Response Training
 - Overtime opportunities expanded to Children's Services caseworkers who are willing and qualified for such work.
- Assigned trainees to support case processing on teams as qualified

Management initiatives

ECDSS CPS Leadership has:

- In concert with the County Executive proposed 19 pieces of legislation to address CPS Practice Issues.
- Commissioner has held over 15 Town Meetings with CPS workers at all levels to gain input and provide clear information and direction of plans for change in CPS. In addition, regular electronic communications to all CPS and Child Welfare staff communicate current issues and plans for action.
- Initiated an "All Hands" strategy that uses available CPS staff, trained Services staff, CPS workers that have transferred to other EC departments including Employment, Detention and Probation, patrol deputies from the Sheriff's Department and any appropriate management and Executive staff to perform Well Child Checks of children on the 4500 open CPS cases to assure current safety. Notes and information are quickly shared with the assigned CPS caseworker.
- Established a short term strategy that has senior CPS managers part of an Initial Case Contact Team that provides the initial visit and assurance of safety on all newly received SCR reports. This strategy allows CPS caseworkers and Team Leaders to focus on the management to closing of current caseloads.
- Established a Case Closing Initiative with a Services Director and an Assistant Commissioner to support CPS teams and caseworkers in moving any possible cases to ongoing services teams.
- Restructured CPS and Child Welfare teams consistent with safety/risk focus and expertise.
- Developed a proposal to access electronic records submitted to Buffalo Schools.
- Issued an RFP to study Chronic Neglect in Erie County. Soon to be awarded.
- Upgraded and replaced CPS laptops and issued additional cell phones with photo capacity for field work.

- Developed Blitz Week strategy: CPS teams will not have new cases for a week to work and complete existing cases as consistent with best practice.
- Assigned staff from non-CPS teams to work in tandem with CPS teams on casework targeted at appropriate determinants and case transfers to preventive services.
- Developed curriculum for a CPS Skills Clinics aimed at enhancing investigations and casework.
- Initiated work group with OCFS directed at increasing capacity to utilize Dragon Speak dictation application.
- Designated new Director of CPS.
- All levels of management held and participated in a large number of staff meetings to communicate expectations and to obtain suggestions for further improvements in services.
- Arranged for private room designated for Child Welfare staff at Family Court so they can complete case notes while waiting for their court appearance.
- Contract with a law enforcement consultant to improve investigative and interviewing techniques, field safety, and improve coordination with municipal police departments.
- Finalized an MOU with Buffalo Police and Central Police Services to obtain needed criminal histories.
- NYC ACS shared comprehensive training curriculum for their CPS Academy. ECDSS is working with OCFS to address training gaps in state curriculum.
- Finalizing meetings with BOCES superintendents to discuss effective partnering between schools and CPS.

Improved oversight

ECDSS Leadership has:

- Worked with the organizational consultant funded by the Casey Family Foundation to assess current practice and to institute best practices.
- Finalized the Safety Assessment and Determinations Corrective Action Plans (CAP) which was approved by OCFS and has moved into the monitoring phase.
- Instituted the coaching initiative with the New York State Office of Children and Family Services to Social Services CPS Team Leaders and case workers on best practice/case closings.
- Implemented process for assessing voluntary agency capacity to accept new preventive cases and hold contract agencies accountable for conducting necessary home visits
- Ongoing case auditing by OCFS on a small sample of cases each month and convenes a joint DSS management and OCFS review of case findings.