

**Testimony  
Judicial Process Committee  
Representative Meyer, Chairman  
September 17, 2009**

Chairman Meyer and members of the Judicial Process Committee, my name is Tara Lea Muhlhauser, and I am the Director of Children and Family Services (CFS) in the Department of Human Services (DHS). I am here today to provide you with information in regard to Section 2 of Senate Bill 2420 at the request of the Legislative Council staff.

Consumer inquiries come to CFS a number of ways: Direct calls from consumers; inquiries from the website; referrals from others, or requests from others to contact a said party; and calls received in the DHS Executive Office regarding child welfare situations and inquiries, calls of inquiry from the Governor's office in response to information the Governor has received, and calls of inquiry received from legislators which typically come directly to the Executive Office (DHS) or to CFS. Most of the calls/consumers are either parents or grandparents. Approximately three calls are received per week.

Protocol is in place at CFS for each of these avenues. Direct calls and referrals are referred on to program administrators (e.g. child safety calls go to the Child Protective Services Administrator). Website inquiries come to me, and I assign them to the Program Administrators. Calls from the Governor's office (which typically come from Monty Rauser), legislators, or the DHS Executive Office come either to me for assignment and resolution, or go directly to the Program Administrator.

Once a call is received, the CFS Program Administrator is expected to address the issue with the consumer or party that same day, if possible. Some situations are resolved with one phone call, some take a deeper case review in order to reach resolution. All case inquiries are handled on a case-by-case basis to allow for individual and unique circumstances of the case. Cases that require attention past one phone call are staffed weekly by the CFS Management Team. Files and documentation (again, based on the depth of the inquiry) are kept by CFS staff. Again, there is a protocol and process in place to receive and address constituent/consumer calls, inquiries and complaints.

Many of the calls and inquiries concern activities that involve a county social service office or county staff of those offices. Further, there is a formal protocol in place that was developed with county personnel to address situations like this. County directors or staff are notified of the concern, as are Regional Supervisors who work with the named county. Regional Supervisors are DHS staff who give program supervision and advice to county social service child welfare staff.

All of these inquiries generally involve confidential information so there are times when we face constraint in providing information back to the caller, depending on the status and legal issues involved with the caller and the case. There are also times when a great deal of anger is expressed because the resolution is not that which the caller wishes.

In summary, I think it is important for you to know that we do have processes and protocol in place for situations where calls of inquiry, concern or complaint are levied. As a staff of social workers and

mental health professionals, we are all trained and prepared to listen, de-escalate if necessary, and reach resolution for the children and families we serve. I am available to address any questions you have.