

**REPORT TO THE TWENTY-FOURTH HAWAII STATE
LEGISLATURE 2007**

**IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE PROVISIONS OF HOUSE
CONCURRENT RESOLUTION 166, HOUSE DRAFT 1**

**DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES
SOCIAL SERVICES DIVISION
DECEMBER 2006**

**REPORT ON HOUSE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION (HCR) 166, HOUSE DRAFT 1,
HAWAII STATE LEGISLATURE, REGULAR SESSION OF 2006**

HCR 166, HD 1, strongly urged the Department to consider temporarily delaying the planned realignment of its Child Welfare Service offices on the Island of Hawaii to allow for the convening of a public, community forum to discuss realignment implications and potential impact on the continuum of child abuse and neglect prevention, family support, family strengthening and voluntary case management services for families and children.

The Department is also to present a report to the Governor and Legislature to include the following: (1) a comprehensive impact study regarding closure and/or reorganization of Child Welfare Services facilities on the Island of Hawaii, including but limited to: (a) community accessibility; (b) effectiveness of service and qualitative impact on the overall mission of child abuse and neglect prevention, family support, family strengthening and voluntary case management services for families and children; and (c) any other concerns regarding closure or realignment of Child Welfare Services facilities on the Island of Hawaii; and (2) any proposed legislation, if applicable.

In response to the concerns posed by the West Hawaii Community, Lillian B. Koller, Director of the Department of Human Services (DHS), and Child Welfare Services Branch management staff traveled to Waimea and participated in three public meetings convened by Representative Cindy Evans on June 6, 2006 specifically to hear and address concerns related to the realignment. The meetings lasted more than 6 ½ hours and were well attended by community members and West Hawaii Child Welfare (CWS) staff as well as Senator Suzanne Chun Oakland, Representative Alex Sonson and Representative Michael Kahikina.

During these meetings, three issues stood out as the major concerns shared by both the community and West Hawaii CWS staff:

- The community and West Hawaii CWS staff did not feel they were adequately involved or informed in the decision to consolidate the West Hawaii CWS offices.
- The Department's ability to respond to emergencies in Waimea if there is no office in Waimea.
- The distance West Hawaii CWS staff will have to travel if the Waimea office is closed.

We appreciated the meetings with the community and their willingness to provide valuable information we can use to maximize the benefits of our plan to consolidate West Hawaii CWS staff into a centralized office and minimize disruption to the West Hawaii community and our staff.

Ensuring the safety, permanency and well-being of children who have been harmed or are at-risk of harm is a top priority for CWS. The findings of the Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) conducted by the Federal Administration for Children and Families (ACF) in 2003 and the subsequent Federally mandated Program Improvement Plan (PIP) have shown us there are many areas that need improvement. The CFSR and PIP also required the State to develop and implement systems changes to ensure that all children and families are provided the best possible support and professional and competent services from Child Welfare Services throughout the State. To ensure this is happening, there will be a subsequent CFSR review conducted by the Federal government and the State in 2009.

The consolidation of the West Hawaii CWS offices was not the first option considered to ensure that the West Hawaii community is provided with competent, consistent and professional services. Prior to the decision to consolidate, the following concerns were brought to our attention through feedback from the community and clients, quality assurance reviews, and complaints from the West Hawaii CWS staff:

- Offices are frequently not adequately staffed, phones are not answered, and offices are closed during operational hours
- Complaints of disrespectful behavior by staff to clients
- Confidential information has been compromised
- Office spaces have been left unlocked and unsecured
- Policies, procedures, rules, and laws are not consistently applied and followed in relation to visitation, client contact, assessments and documentation
- Unprofessional behavior between staff has been reported (swearing, yelling, slamming doors)
- Office spaces are crowded and staff have complained
- Not enough supervision to ensure consistent practice
- Clients report feeling threaten by staff, and are not allowed to see their children
- Material inventory is not accurate
- The community is concerned about the way clients are treated by CWS staff
- Some staff may not be working full days

To resolve these and other issues, we deployed two full-time administrators to West Hawaii to work with the Section Administrator, staff, and community for over one year, but there has been resistance and a lack of cooperation in West Hawaii to identify and resolve problems, establish clear work expectations, provide training, and ensure that consistent and professional services are provided by CWS staff.

Despite the assistance provided to the West Hawaii section administration, supervisors and staff, when compared to other sections, the West Hawaii CWS is experiencing, among other problems:

- The highest percentage of children waiting for permanent homes;
- A lack of connection to services for families prior to court order removal of children;
- Inadequate efforts to reunify children with their biological parents; and
- As of April 2006, seventy-seven (77) unlicensed foster homes with children placed in the homes, compared with six unlicensed homes in the next worse area.

At the same time, the caseloads for the West Hawaii social workers are among the lowest in the State, averaging 14 or lower per worker, compared with an average of over 20 for other CWS workers throughout the State in June 2006. Yet despite additional resources, and the Federally mandated PIP, West Hawaii offices continue to experience significant problems.

The situation is not acceptable; we cannot responsibly ignore the problems that have been brought to our attention. We believe we have no other choice but to relocate and consolidate our CWS offices in Captain Cook, Pottery Terrace and Kamuela. The consolidation, which was initially discussed with CWS staff in 2005, is not a cost-cutting measure, as it has been characterized by those opposed to the consolidation. Rather, it is a long-planned move to elevate

the quality of CWS services in West Hawaii. By relocating staff from satellite offices to a much larger and better-equipped facility near Kailua-Kona, the quality of services for abused and neglected children and their families will improve because staff will receive closer supervisory assistance at the centralized office, and benefit from shared knowledge, skills and resources.

This is not the first time the Department has relocated and centralized Child Welfare staff. We have successfully centralized offices in Honolulu, Leeward Oahu and Maui. The Maui section, which is centrally located in Wailuku, faces many of the same geographical challenges that West Hawaii faces in providing services to remote areas such as Hana. Yet the centrally located Maui Section out-performed all other areas that were reviewed during the 2003 federal CFSR. In part, they attributed their success to the centralizing of their units, the pooling of resources and a collaborative, and supportive working relationship between the units, supervisors and staff.

To ensure the consolidation proceeds smoothly for the clients, staff and the community, DHS is planning:

- A “first responder” service so children taken into protective custody by the Police or who are in crisis receive timely attention;
- Additional meetings with the West Hawaii community to identify issues and training needs for CWS staff;
- Training sessions conducted by the Maui CWS workers regarding a “check-list” system for foster home licensing that has worked successfully for the last 15 years on Maui;
- Purchase of laptop computers with modems so staff can access CWS information and input data in the field;
- Purchase of cellular phones with better reception capacity;
- Development of optional case assignment guidelines so clients can be visited by social workers who live nearby; and
- Information sessions for staff so they can learn how to reduce commute times by participating in a flexible work hours program and by taking State vehicles home.

Again, we appreciate the interest of the West Hawaii community and the Legislature and we look forward to your continued support as we work together toward our goals of safety, permanency and well-being for children and families in West Hawaii.