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To: Legislative Budget Committee
From: Ashley Stites, Fiscal Analyst
Re: Child Welfare System Task Force Update

CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM TASK FORCE UPDATE

The following provides a brief overview of the Child Welfare System Task Force's working group process and preliminary recommendations.

Background

House Sub. for SB 126 (L. 2017, ch. 102) requires the Secretary for Children and Families to establish a Child Welfare System Task Force (Task Force) to study the child welfare system. The bill directs the Task Force to convene working groups to study the general administration of child welfare by the Department for Children and Families (DCF), protective services, family preservation, reintegration, foster care, and permanency placement. The Task Force and each working group are directed to study the following topics:

- The level of oversight and supervision by DCF over each entity that contracts with DCF to provide reintegration, foster care, and adoption services;
- The duties, responsibilities, and contributions of state agencies, nongovernmental entities, and service providers that provide child welfare services in the state;
- The level of access to child welfare services, including, but not limited to, health and mental health services and community-based services in the state;
- The increasing number of children in the child welfare system and contributing factors;
- The licensing standards for case managers working in the child welfare system; and
- Any other topic the Child Welfare System Task Force or a working group deems necessary or appropriate.

The Task Force consists of the following members:

- The Chairperson of the Senate Committee on Public Health and Welfare;

- The Vice-chairperson of the Senate Committee on Public Health and Welfare;
- The Ranking Minority Member of the Senate Committee on Public Health and Welfare;
- The Chairperson of the House Committee on Children and Seniors;
- The Vice-chairperson of the House Committee on Children and Seniors;
- The Ranking Minority Member of the House Committee on Children and Seniors;
- One member appointed by the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court;
- One representative of Kansas Court Appointed Special Advocates, appointed by the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court;
- One member of a citizen review board, appointed by the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court;
- One member representing a foster parent organization, appointed by the Judicial Council;
- One guardian *ad litem* with experience representing children in child in need of care cases, appointed by the Judicial Council;
- One family law attorney with experience providing legal services to parents and grandparents in child in need of care cases, appointed by the Judicial Council;
- One social worker licensed by the Behavioral Sciences Regulatory Board, appointed by the Judicial Council;
- One member of the state Child Death Review Board established by KSA 22a-243, appointed by the Board;
- One county or district attorney with experience in child in need of care cases, appointed by the Kansas County and District Attorneys Association; and
- One law enforcement officer, appointed by the Kansas Association of Chiefs of Police.

In addition, the following are non-voting members of the Task Force:

- The Secretary for Children and Families or the Secretary's designee;
- The director of prevention and protection services for DCF; and
- One representative from each entity that contracts with DCF to provide foster care, family preservation, reintegration, and permanency placement services.

The Legislative Coordinating Council (LCC) approved six meeting days for the Task Force in 2017. The Task Force met five times in 2017: on August 4, September 19, October 10, November 14, and December 12. Details regarding the 2017 Task Force meetings can be found in the 2017 *Preliminary Report*, which also contains the preliminary conclusions and ten preliminary recommendations adopted by the Task Force. The LCC approved five meeting days for the Task Force in 2018. The Task Force met February 2, July 16, August 27, September 28, and October 22 and is scheduled to meet on December 4.

Working Groups

The Task Force established three working groups: General Administration of Child Welfare and Foster Care (Working Group A), Protective Services and Family Preservation (Working Group B), and Reintegration and Permanency Placement (Working Group C).

The working groups consisted of no fewer than two task force members and no more than seven non-Task Force members. The Task Force Chairperson, Vice-chairperson, and the Ranking Minority Member together appointed the chairperson and vice-chairperson of each working group from the members of the Task Force. The chairperson and vice-chairperson of each working group jointly appointed the members of each working group. The non-Task Force members were selected based on their experience in the specific working group topic for which they were appointed. The Kansas Health Institute facilitated the working group meetings.

Overview of Working Group A

Working Group A met ten times between October 2017 and July 2018. Working Group A's goals included improving workforce morale and tenure; streamlining technology and communication across the state agencies, nongovernmental entities, and child welfare service providers; and oversight and supervision by DCF over each entity that contracts with DCF to provide reintegration, foster care, and adoption services. Working Group A developed the following recommendations:

- Invest in the child welfare system workforce;
- Update data infrastructure, including an integrated case management and data reporting system;
- Require access to medical and behavioral health care;
- Fund the Office of the Child Advocate;
- Analyze child welfare service delivery, including costs, benefits of prioritization, and public/private delivery collaborations; and
- Create outcome measures for foster care contractors.

Overview of Working Group B

Working Group B met 11 times between October 2017 and September 2018. Working Group B's goals included strengthening the assessment of risk and safety and eliminating child fatalities by abuse and neglect; examining the contributing factors to the increasing number of children in the child welfare system, including, but not limited to, substance use disorder, legislation, and policies, and determine ways to safely reduce the number of children in the child welfare system; and strengthening safety net and early childhood education programs. Working Group B developed the following recommendations:

- Fund and institute provisions of the federal Families First Prevention Services Act;
- Establish an information-sharing system;
- Provide immediate response to hotline calls;
- Formalize a Serious Injury Review Team;
- Employ only highly skilled and experienced front-end child welfare staff;

- Do not remove children solely for non-abuse neglect reasons; and
- Fully fund, strengthen, and expand safety net and early childhood programs.

Overview of Working Group C

Working Group C met 12 times between October 2017 and September 2018. Working Group C's goals included improving child well-being and outcomes for youth aging out of care; expanding the level of access to child welfare services to support reintegration and permanency; increasing reunification rates and improving times to reintegration by strengthening services and supporting cross-sector collaboration; and increasing the rate of and support for adoptions to improve time to permanency. Working Group C developed the following recommendations:

- Provide youth in the foster care system with re-entry and transitional services;
- Prioritize delivering services in natural settings;
- Ensure access to early childhood behavioral health services;
- Fund the Court Appointed Special Advocates program;
- Provide consistent, individualized, evidence-based reintegration support;
- Restructure the case plan process;
- Fund increased physical access between children in need of care and their families;
- Invest in foster home recruitment and retention;
- Audit potential funding streams by program area to ensure maximum federal benefit;
- Provide a system that is accountable and resourced well enough to provide needed services;
- Enlist the services of a process engineer to achieve faster and more efficient permanency;
- Modify the Kansas Code for the Care of Children; and
- Ensure state and federal subsidies to adoptive families and implement best practices for post-adoptive support services.

Task Force Update

On August 27, 2018, members of Working Group A and Working Group B presented their group recommendations to the Task Force. On September 28, 2018, members of Working Group C presented their group's recommendations to the Task Force. Starting from the recommendations made by each working group, the Task Force began a discussion of the recommendations.

On October 22, 2018, the Task Force continued the discussion of the recommendations made by the working groups and began prioritizing the recommendations into three tiers. The Task Force will meet on December 4, 2018, to finalize its recommendations. The Task Force must submit a final report to the Legislature on or before January 14, 2019.

AES/kmb