

**COALITION TO IMPROVE
ACCESS AND SERVICES
FOR
CHILDREN, YOUTH & FAMILIES**

March 11, 2011

His Excellency Deval Patrick, Governor
Commonwealth of Massachusetts
State House
Boston, Massachusetts 02133

Dear Governor Patrick:

As advocates for children and families, and as organizations whose members include those who provide and families who use essential services for some of the Commonwealth's most vulnerable families, we appreciate your strong interest in and support for streamlining and making more integrated the current system.

We all agree that reforms are needed to improve the systems of care for children and families in our Commonwealth and fully support the goal of making direct care services more easily accessible and available for children and families. At the same time, we are concerned about the use of a reorganization plan as the primary tool for reform and about the pace at which we understand you to be seeking to implement it. Further we are troubled at rumors that you will be seeking the Legislature's consideration of the reorganization under Article 87 of the State Constitution. Unlike other legislation, that filed in accordance with Article 87 only allows the Legislature to reject or approve the legislation with no opportunity for amendments, input or true debate on the merits of the proposal

We believe that any plan for reform must begin with an open and inclusive process of 1) seeking input from legislative leaders, representatives of our organizations, our members, and other stakeholders who understand the realities of families who receive services on a day-to-day basis and 2) an analysis of outcome data regarding the effectiveness of current services and systems.

While a re-configured central organizational structure may provide some benefits simply by placing a stronger focus upon children and families, real reform will require more. As you know, major barriers for families include the inadequacy of services available and lack of effective supports navigating and coordinating the care they are receiving. Often the reason families find it difficult to locate services is because there are limited numbers of them, not just because they do not know where to turn. Without sufficient external input, the proposed plan may not address these barriers. In fact, an unintended consequence of making changes only to the administrative structures may be that services become less accessible. Any plan should have sufficient specificity to demonstrate that the desired outcome will be

achieved. If easier access is the goal, the plan should specifically demonstrate how services on the ground will be improved.

There are several issues that the state must address now and in the immediate future that suggest EOHHS rethink how it moves forward with improving access and outcomes for children and families.

- ✓ The current fiscal environment and the current state budget climate have an immediate and negative impact on the ability of the state to provide and purchase the needed services. All of our collective political and workforce capital needs to be focused on the biggest challenge facing all of us right now. Nothing in the present plan addresses resource availability.
- ✓ Improving access to and provision of services can be accomplished by reform of the current structure, rather than a reorganization of it. There are many pilot reforms being delivered throughout the state that should be evaluated to determine their effectiveness. Those with proven efficacy could then be implemented across the Commonwealth. Could those pilots be the focus of reform or reorganization? Further, a number of “backroom” functions can be implemented by consolidating those tasks at EOHHS.
- ✓ The Children’s Rights class action lawsuit filed against DCF, which is moving forward in Federal Court, is focused on how the state provides services to children in the child welfare system, not on how the state agency that is responsible for those services is organized within state government. Responding to this lawsuit will demand much attention of state officials.

The success of EOHHS’s efforts in achieving reform will be dependent on the degree to which a full and comprehensive planning and design process occurs that addresses the real, current needs of children and families. It must be undertaken with responsiveness to the capacity of a currently already multiple-tasked and under-resourced public and private human resource system. In such a process we ask that a broad based planning and design committee be formally established that is fairly representative of organizations of families and youth who use or who have used services and those associations whose members provide them. Intimate knowledge of the current child and family system and how it is currently delivered must be considered in any process to improve it. In addition, any potential reorganization should include maximum input from all stakeholders, including public hearings.

We wish to acknowledge again your interest in children’s services. Again, it is our belief that reform of the current system to improve access and availability may or may not result in a reorganization of state agencies. We hope that you will strongly consider our request in the interest of all the children and families of the Commonwealth.

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