

Panel cuts budget for DYFS plan

Legislators vote down half of \$15M request

BY SUSAN K. LIVIO Star-Ledger Staff March 31, 2004

Dealing an early setback to Gov. James E. McGreevey's plan to remake the Division of Youth and Family Services, a legislative panel has rejected more than half of a \$15 million budget request to get many of the reforms rolling before the fiscal year ends in June.

The Joint Budget Oversight Committee unanimously voted Monday to approve only a \$7 million budget transfer for Human Services Commissioner James Davy to begin hiring workers and signing contracts with religious groups to recruit foster families.

Davy and a spokesman for McGreevey said yesterday they do not intend to revise their plans. State officials and child advocates said this may signal the beginning of a protracted funding battle with lawmakers over the governor's plan to spend more than \$320 million over the next 2 1/2 years to improve child protection.

"The commissioner will go back and provide (the committee) with any information they are looking for, and the remaining funds will hopefully be made available," said Micah Rasmussen, McGreevey's spokesman. "But we are not giving the commissioner any instruction to scale things back."

Davy told the committee the \$15 million is needed in part to hire 198 caseworkers and 38 case aides to help reduce the large caseloads of those responsible for investigating child abuse and neglect. The funds also would also be used to hire 11 inspectors to license foster homes and five employees to investigate abuse and neglect in foster care, schools, day care centers and other facilities.

The \$15 million is a down payment on the \$320 million reform plan driven by the settlement of a class-action lawsuit brought by Children's Rights Inc. of New York, which alleged the state violated the rights of foster children. The settlement required the state to make a huge investment in the long-neglected agency and to submit to court monitoring for years to come.

Since McGreevey and Davy released their reform plan last month, Senate Budget Committee Chairman Wayne Bryant (D-Camden) and Assembly Budget Committee Chairman Louis Greenwald (D-Camden) have publicly balked at the price tag.

On Monday, Bryant said he refused to support Davy's request for \$15 million because the state has yet to dedicate about \$8.1 million of the \$24.8 million lawmakers approved in DYFS reform money last year. He attributed the budget figures to the nonpartisan Office of Legislative Services.

"We need more detail of what is exactly going to be spent in the next three months," he said. Bryant also expressed doubts in the state's ability to hire and train so many workers at once.

Davy insisted the original \$24.8 million, while not all spent yet, "is fully obligated." In an interview yesterday, Davy said the unspent money is for salaries and benefits from now until June for 271 workers who already have been hired.

Davy said 1,000 applicants have been screened, while 2,000 more are under review. "You would think people would shy away from coming forward to be part of children's services in New Jersey given the history. But the reality is people are energized by the reform effort," he said.

The committee -- consisting of Sens. Bryant, Greenwald and Leonard Lance (R-Hunterdon), Assemblywoman Bonnie Watson-Coleman (D-Mercer) and Assemblyman Joseph Malone (R-Burlington) -- unanimously voted to give DYFS \$7 million of its \$15 million request.

"Commissioner, I know your heart is in the right place," Greenwald said. "But our decisions are difficult -- \$8 million (could be) money for research for children with autism, for cancer victims in Newark. ... The list goes on and on. It's why

So ask the questions, get the answers, but do not put up any roadblocks. Get the job done.

Human Services chief rips cut in his request for funds

BY SUSAN K. LIVIO Star-Ledger Staff April 01, 2004

State Human Services Commissioner James Davy yesterday lashed out at lawmakers who withheld more than half of the \$15 million he requested to launch child welfare reforms this year, saying he "shouldn't have to fight for the dollars to protect children's lives."

While visiting the Center for Family Services, a prevention program serving destitute young mothers in Camden County, Davy criticized the Joint Budget Oversight Committee's decision to reduce his request to \$7 million on Monday.

"I don't have a problem as commissioner and a public servant justifying the dollars needed," said Davy, who promised to provide the lawmakers with more information. "We should be accountable. But I shouldn't have to fight for the dollars in order to protect children's lives. If I have to fight, I will fight."

Senate Budget Committee Chairman Wayne Bryant (D-Camden) and Assembly Budget Committee Chairman Louis Greenwald (D-Camden) said Davy had provided scant detail on how he would use an additional \$15 million from now until the fiscal year ends June 30. They also said Davy had not spent all of the \$24.8 million in additional funding for his agency that was included in the current budget.

Bryant's spokesman yesterday praised Davy for championing his cause: a \$320 million, court-monitored plan that would overhaul the state's troubled child welfare agency over the next 2 1/2 years. Davy has offered the plan to settle a civil rights lawsuit on behalf of foster children.

"That's what advocates do, and we commend him for being an advocate," said Jim Manion, spokesman for the Senate Democratic Majority Office. "But (Bryant and Greenwald) have tough decisions to make."

Tensions have recently emerged between Gov. James E. McGreevey's administration and the Legislature over the cost to overhaul DYFS, which comes as the governor and lawmakers attempt to close a projected \$4 billion budget gap. Yesterday's event in Camden marked the third public appearance Davy has made in the home county of Greenwald and Bryant in less than two months.

Davy will be back before a Senate budget panel on April 7 to defend the proposal to spend \$125 million in the upcoming budget year to begin retraining DYFS staff, expanding drug treatment programs and recruiting foster parents.

During yesterday's visit to the Center for Family Services, Davy said \$6 million should be spent to expand similar child abuse prevention programs around the state. It is part of a \$29 million prevention effort included in the multiyear reform plan. The idea is to teach parenting skills to young mothers and fathers so their children are never abused or neglected and don't need the services of the state's child welfare agency.

"The rate of abuse among young children is truly disturbing," Davy said, noting that 19 percent of abuse victims are under the age of 1. "We need to start earlier and reach their parents even before these children are born."

At the center, young women explained how social workers came into their homes and showed them how to be better mothers, secure needed health

"They should want to give you money for this program -- that's not right," Jennifer Wilkin, 19, of Northampton told Davy. Wilkin, who has a 2-year-old son, said the program's caseworkers "have been there for me every step."

"I was 16 when I got pregnant," said Lydia Rios, now 18. "I didn't know what to do with a baby or anything." Weeping, she said her support worker at the center is "someone very special in my life. If it wasn't for her, I don't know what I would do. ... My son would be in DYFS."

DHS PRESS RELEASE

March 31 , 2004

Davy proposes \$6 million dollar expansion of child abuse prevention programs for new mothers

CAMDEN— Department of Human Services (DHS) Acting Commissioner Jim Davy proposed a \$6 million expansion of child abuse prevention programs for new and expectant mothers today as part of the State's efforts to reform its child welfare system.

As part of the announcement, Acting Commissioner Davy met with young mothers and their children served by the Center for Family Services' (CFS) Healthy Families program. The program promotes healthy parent-child interaction with intensive home visitation by family support workers.

"Prevention is the key to our child welfare reform plan," said Acting Commissioner Davy. "By providing more prevention services, we can help more families and children receive help earlier and hopefully prevent the tragedy of child abuse."

Healthy Families works closely with expectant and new mothers by providing early intervention and family support services. Building a bond with the family, support workers ensure families have medical providers and help families follow up on immunization schedules. Workers also assist in identifying needs of the mothers and children and linking them with other community resources such as day care options, educational training and job placement. Families are generally served until the child reaches age five.

According to Davy, there is a dire need for more child abuse prevention programs especially ones designed to protect younger children. Each year in New Jersey, 19 percent of child abuse victims are under the age of one. Thirty nine percent of victims are under the age of five.

Last year, DHS conducted a statistical analysis of child abuse neglect deaths from 1998-2002. Out of the 123 total deaths, 70 deaths or 57 percent were of children under the age of one. Out of the 70 deaths under the age of one, nine deaths occurred in Camden County including six in the City of Camden.

"The rate of abuse among young children is truly disturbing," said Acting Commissioner Davy. "We need to start earlier and reach their parents even before these children are born- this abuse and these deaths have to stop. That's why programs like Healthy Families are so important."

Started in 1996, the Healthy Families program is funded annually at \$3 million by DHS. Statewide there are 20 programs serving 1,000 families. This year, Center for Family Services received \$200,000 to serve 100 families through the Healthy Families program.

"Every dollar spent in prevention saves thousands required to fix recurring problems," said Richard Stagliano, President/CEO of Center for Family Services. "The need for prevention services like Healthy Families is much higher than what is currently available. With more money designated for prevention programs, we can significantly reduce the number of abuse and neglect cases."

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HHS Releases 2002 National Statistics on Child Abuse and Neglect

4/1/2004 11:15:00 AM

WASHINGTON, April 1 /U.S. Newswire/ -- An estimated 896,000 children across the country were victims of abuse or

neglect in 2002, according to national data released today by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The statistics indicate about 12.3 out of every 1,000 children were victims of abuse or neglect, a rate slightly below the previous year's victimization rate of 12.4 out of 1,000 children.

"Our hearts break when we hear of a child being physically or emotionally abused or neglected," HHS Secretary Tommy G. Thompson said. "The abuse of children remains a national tragedy that demands our commitment and action. President Bush's budget plan gives the child welfare system at the community level more resources and more flexibility to better protect children from abuse and neglect."

The statistics released today, at the start of Child Abuse Prevention Month, are based on information collected through the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System. The data show that child protective service agencies received about 2,600,000 reports of possible maltreatment in 2002.

Counselors at the Family First Resources Center, which was set to open this week on the Gulf Coast and teach parenting skills to those at risk of losing their children, are instead packing up their office, a result of a sudden cutback by the state. In explaining the closing of 34 child abuse prevention centers across the state, officials at the Mississippi Department of Human Services blamed the previous administration for allocating \$20 million it never had. "It's always been a struggle but this has been a real blow to us," said Bridget Logan, executive director of the Center for the P0A>>> BDC

had earlier been determined to be unfit.

Court documents cite another plaintiff, Jamison J., 17, who has spent most of his life cycled through 28 foster homes and institutions, some of them abusive. The lawsuit claims the Division of Family and Children's Services ignored opportunities for adoption and later sent the boy back to the home of his mother, where he witnessed the beating of another child. Despite his complaints to a caseworker, the child was later killed by the mother's companion.

Wayne Drinkwater, a Jackson lawyer who is co-counsel in the Children's Rights lawsuit, said the deficiencies were longstanding and systemic.

"This has gone on so long that it's hopeless to expect the state to ever cure the problems on its own," Mr. Drinkwater said.

"Part of the problem may be financial, but it's more than that. It's about priorities and abused and neglected children don't have a lobbyist. They have no political influence in the Legislature."

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Committee on Education and the Workforce Hearings

Testimony Prepared for United States House of Representatives

Committee on Education and the Workforce

Subcommittee on Select Education

"CAPTA:

occur in foster placements and residential placements as well. It often seems that the child welfare system and workers are trapped between "a rock and the hard place" when they consider their options for providing services and protection to vulnerable children.

The troubles are not merely local. They are not the failings of individual caseworkers, supervisors, or administrators.

When tragedies occur, the mantra-like claim is that the child "fell through the cracks in the system." These are not small cracks. They are national fault

and measured. Behavioral change is thought to be a two-step process--one simply changes from

"This isn't the kind of issue where you can nickel and dime this thing to death," Davy said. "It is time for [legislators] to stand tall and to do the right and moral thing."

The disagreement sets the stage for Davy's scheduled appearance before the Senate Budget Committee tomorrow. He says he is prepared to make a case for why the agency needs an additional \$125 million next year to fund court-mandated changes to an agency dogged by crises.

An oversight panel has accepted in principle DYFS's overhaul plan, which was drawn up after last year's settlement of a 1999 lawsuit brought by the advocacy group Children's Rights over the treatment of children in state custody.

TRENTON – Department of Human Services (DHS) Acting Commissioner Jim Davy announced today the emergency hiring of 158 new staff for the Division of Youth and Family Services (DYFS) to help ease the burden of heavy caseloads.

As part of the hiring initiative, 72 frontline caseworkers will be added as well as eight supervisors and 78 case aides to assist caseworkers. The \$2.8 million cost is part of a \$7 million budget transfer the Department received last week to begin the process of reforming the State's child welfare system.

“When meeting with DYFS staff the past few weeks, I have received nothing but positive feedback on our reform efforts and assurances we truly are moving in the right direction,” said Acting Commissioner Davy. “However, time and time again I have heard a common complaint- caseloads are too high and our staff needs immediate relief.”

Earlier this year, DYFS initiated a case closing project with managers and supervisors working overtime to close cases no longer needing attention. Though 11,823 cases have been closed, the same number of cases have been opened during the same time period, limiting the Division's ability to make a serious dent in its caseload of 65,000.

In addition to the emergency hiring initiative, Davy also announced \$1.4 million will be spent to help children with behavioral health issues. Many children are languishing in county detention centers and other institutional settings because there is no where else for them to go.

Mobile crisis response will be expanded into Middlesex, Mercer and Passaic counties and 28 treatment beds (eight emergency and 20 non-emergency) will be added to serve children with behavioral health issues in local communities. According to Davy, intensive behavioral assistance services will be expanded so an additional 326 families can be served.

The remainder of the \$7 million supplemental will be used to continue DYFS' ongoing safety assessment project of children in foster care, provide medical examinations for children in placement and eliminate the

Metro Region

Edison	1,843	41	2		2	4
Perth Amboy	3,039	48	4	1	2	7
East Orange	2,258	43	4	1	2	7
Bloomfield	2,278	43	2		2	4
Newark I	2,030	47	2		2	4
Newark II	2,552	54	2		2	4
Newark III	1,880	51			3	3
Union East	2,637	50	4	1	2	7
Union West	1,661	38	2		2	4
Region Totals	20,178	415	22	3	19	44

Northern Region

Bayonne	2,006	55	2		2	4
Bergen	2,895	60	5		2	7
Jersey City	1,230	37	1		3	4
No. Hudson	1,790	39	4	1	1	6
Morris	1,693	37	4	1	2	7
Central Passaic	2,016	53	1		3	4
Sussex	794	19	2		2	4
Warren	653	17			1	1
Northern Passaic	883	39			2	2
Region Totals	13,960	356	19	2	18	39

Southern Region

Atlantic	2,000	54	3		2	5
Burlington	2,539	59	2		3	5
Camden Central	3,831	81	4	1	2	7
Camden North	2,861	66	4	1	1	6
Cape May	890	30	2		2	4
Cumberland	2,251	51	2		2	4
Gloucester	2,009	38	4	1	1	6
Salem	960	23	1		2	3
Region Totals	17,341	402	22	3	15	40

D.O./Region totals **60,879** **1,437** **72** **8** **65** **145**

Grand Totals **64,889** **1,675** **72** **8** **78** **158**
(Including ARCs)

NOTE: Current staff/caseload numbers do not include the Institutional Abuse Investigation Unit.
Current staffing numbers also do not include 26 regional/permanency caseworker positions.

Senate panel asked to give DYFS \$125M

Davy seeks 6 000ADC ()Tj EMC 14.942 0 Td (include 26 regional/permanency caseworker posit

But a top lawmaker said that while he supports better protection for children in New Jersey, officials at the Division of Youth and Family Services must provide concrete details about their reform plan before legislators will agree to additional funding.

"This is only a skeleton," said Sen. Wayne Bryant (D-Camden), chairman of the Senate Budget and Appropriations Committee. "It's not a fleshed-out plan."

"All we're asking for is to give us the details. I'm hoping as we get that detail we'll make sure that whatever funding is necessary will happen."

Bryant's comments came after Davy asked the committee to increase the DYFS budget to \$659 million from the current level of \$535 million.

The additional money is part of a blueprint to overhaul an agency that faced fierce criticism after a series of horrific child abuse cases.

State officials agreed to the reform plan in order to settle a lawsuit brought by a children's rights group. An independent panel appointed by the court to oversee reforms tentatively approved the plan and its price tag. Officials have warned that the state could be held in contempt of court if it fails to carry out the reforms.

But Bryant said the Legislature would make its own decision. He previously questioned the \$125 million figure and was one of several lawmakers who last week pared a Davy request for \$15 million in emergency funding. The agency got \$7 million instead.

The senator said he shouldn't be criticized for asking questions.

"If I question anything in this plan, am I against children? No," Bryant said.

Senate President Richard Codey (D-Essex) said Monday that he was confident that DYFS would get the full \$15 million it is seeking.

Davy and members of his staff highlighted various aspects of the reform plan, including new efforts to recruit foster families, treat substance abuse in communities and improve management at DYFS. But members of the committee pressed for more details.

Sen. Barbara Buono (D-Middlesex) called the plan too complex.

"It left me more confused. I had more questions than answers," Buono said.

Sen. Leonard Lance (R-Hunterdon), leader of the Senate Republicans, said the GOP is willing to help but stopped short of endorsing the additional funding.

Lawmakers talk DYFS, not politics

A state Senate budget committee began weighing \$125 million more and plans for an overhaul.

By Troy Graham Inquirer Staff Writer April 8, 2004

TRENTON - After weeks of wrangling over the cost of overhauling New Jersey's troubled child-welfare system, senators controlling the state's pocketbook struck an amicable tone and posed few tough questions about the package of proposals at a budget hearing yesterday.

Sen. Wayne R. Bryant (D., Camden), chairman of the Senate Budget and Appropriations Committee, opened the hearing by saying he wanted "to lower the rhetoric" surrounding the plan, which would cost an additional \$125 million in the next

committee that endorsed just \$7 million of a \$15 million request for the remainder of this budget year, which ends June 30.

"Year after year, funding has been carved out of the DYFS budget to pay for initiatives and programs elsewhere in state government," Davy said yesterday. "Today we see the results - a system that is understaffed, undertrained, underequipped, under siege, and leaving children in harm's way."

He said New Jersey had the lowest per-capita funding for children's services of any Northeastern state except New Hampshire.

Buono, posing the most pointed question of the morning, asked Davy: "What assurances do we have that [the plan] will actually work?"

Davy said the plan called for more accountability and had benchmarks for success, but he acknowledged that many of those goals had to be determined.

"It's a lot of everything, senator," he said. "But we're headed in that direction, and that's our commitment."

Overhaul begins with reinforcing DYFS' front line

BY SUSAN K. LIVIO Star-Ledger Staff April 11, 2004

Acting Human Services Commissioner James Davy announced last week he will start hiring the first wave of 1,500 additional workers for the oft-maligned, understaffed and demoralized Division of Youth and Family Services.

But bulking up the work force will be the easy part of his mission, which is to reverse decades of systemic mismanagement and dysfunction.

Davy's ambitious reconstruction project will have to survive the competing needs of an entrenched bureaucracy, a Legislature struggling with budget shortfalls and an unflinching panel of child welfare experts appointed by a federal court judge.

The infusion of reinforcements will no doubt reduce onerous DYFS caseloads -- a key component in the recent settlement of a class-action lawsuit filed on behalf of New Jersey's 13,000 foster children. But, Davy said, he is equally focused on the quality of those workers, whose performance has been criticized frequently in the past year.

DYFS, he testified before a

service rules that compromised quality work. She said, and many child welfare advocate agreed, that personnel rules shield incompetent people.

Davy is taking a different approach.

"I don't need laws or rules to be changed," Davy said. "People have not known how to use civil service rules to hold people accountable, but I do."

For now, that's fine with the Child Welfare Panel. "But in 12 to 18 months we want to take a hard look at human resource issues -- hiring, promotions, discipline," Cohen said. "If the state is not using its authority, we want the state to talk about it."

Lowry is succinct in her appraisal: "There has to be someone looking over everybody's shoulder."

Reform does not come cheaply.

Davy is asking for \$320 million over the next 30 months to make hundreds of improvements to DYFS, which include hiring and training staff and expanding drug treatment and child abuse prevention programs.

But Democratic lawmakers immediately questioned the price tag and recently cut his \$15 million request for the current fiscal year to \$7 million.

In an emotional plea to the Senate Budget and Appropriations Committee on Wednesday, Davy asked for \$125 million more for DYFS next year. "Our system doesn't work and it is failing kids," Davy said. "As adults, thousands of these children are still in our mental health, welfare and correctional systems. We have helped consign our children to this fate by years of shortsighted decision making."