

DHS News Flash

Community Oversight Board Commends DHS on Reform Effort

In its first report to the Mayor, the Community Oversight Board commended DHS on its progress and called for continued reform efforts.

Reforms, was released at a January press conference. The report assesses the Department’s progress in achieving each of the 30 recommendations made by the Child Welfare Review Panel and notes the following accomplishments:

“Overall, the COB is favorably impressed with the level of effort that has gone into structuring activities of the Department to move toward the needed changes. DHS has responded to the specific recommendations and time frames in the *Call to Action*, while simultaneously focusing on the need to develop an infrastructure to sustain change over time,” the report states.

“DHS is responding with remarkable resiliency and is actively moving towards a model of practice for itself and its provider community that reflects core child welfare principles.”

from the Community Oversight Board Report, “Assessment of Progress.”

⇒ **The development of a new mission and values statement.** DHS has taken both an analytical and internal/external engagement approach to developing and vetting its mission statement and core values.

⇒ **The implementation of ongoing, face-to-face safety assessment visits for all children receiving in-home services.** The Department completed visits to ensure the safety and well being of all children receiving in-home services in February 2007.

The Community Oversight Board was created on June 14, 2007 by Executive Order. Its report, *Assessment of Progress Made by Philadelphia Department of Human Services in Implementing Child Welfare*

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A message from Acting Commissioner, Arthur C. Evans, Ph.D.

I am pleased to present this summary of the Community Oversight Board’s report on DHS’ accomplishments. In the past year, the Department has faced many formidable challenges. Changing the culture and practice of an organization is never easy. Yet, despite numerous obstacles, the staff at DHS has remained focused and committed. From administration to front line staff, many people have pulled together in a time of crisis to move this organization.

I am proud of the work and the many accomplishments that this organization has achieved. Moreover, I know that this staff is dedicated to completing the reforms in progress and ensuring their sustainability for the future. It has been a distinct honor to work with so many devoted and driven staff. On behalf of myself, and the many children and families served by the department, I extend my deepest gratitude.

- ⇒ **The implementation of expedited face-to-face response for children five and younger.** Expedited response (within two hours of when a report is assigned) was implemented in June 2007, and has been augmented by the creation of two new units.
- ⇒ **Clarifications of provider roles and responsibilities.** DHS has issued enhanced SCOH standards with an increased focus on safety and protection. Follow-up training has reinforced the standards.
- ⇒ **Validation of provider face –to-face contact with children.** In June 2007, the Department’s Contract Administration and Provider Evaluation (CAPE) unit began making weekly phone calls to a sample of families to confirm that provider visits had been made and to assess the quality of services provided.
- ⇒ **Implementation of the Commissioner’s Action Response Office (CARO).** CARO was established in April 2007 to address concerns and complaints. It receives an average of 20 referrals a week.
- ⇒ **Ongoing community input and participation.** A series of town-hall meetings were held from September through December 2007. The Child Welfare Advisory Board was reactivated and meetings were held with Stakeholders throughout the region
- ⇒ **Social worker consultation with medical and behavioral health professionals.** Two nurses are available to help identify medically needy children and to assist social workers in better meeting their needs. Consultants from the Department of Behavioral health are on site at DHS and family court to assist with difficult cases.
- ⇒ **Enhancement of the Child Fatality Review Process.** Improvements were made to the child fatality review process including the appointment of a full time manager in December as well as the addition of specialists from pediatrics and psychiatry. A new rapid response fatality team meets within 24 to 48 hours of a death in a family active with DHS.
- ⇒ **Increasing agency transparency.** DHS has developed a communications plan and hired a communications director. It has also developed a variety of vehi-

cles to communicate with the public including: a regularly updated website, distribution of the DHS News Flash, widely distributed Reform Updates and media briefings.

The Oversight Board’s report also notes that DHS has begun implementation and/or made substantial progress toward completing several other recommendations including:

- * **Implementation of evidenced-based safety assessment tools.** Training of staff began this month.
- * **Face-to-face visits to children in placement.** Safety visits have begun for every child in placement .
- * **DHS monitoring of provider agencies.** DHS has established a new unit within CAPE to assist with enhanced monitoring. A Provider Accountability Forum meets twice a month. As a result 13 agencies have been closed to intake.
- * **Clarification of DHS Supervisor’s Role.** Leadership development classes began in July, 2007. Additionally, DHS has developed several automated tools to assist supervisors in their work including an automated court tracking log, an automated supervisory compliance log and an automated supervisory conference log.

The full report of the Community Oversight Board is available at dhs.phila.gov.

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 comment?
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