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An Examination of Organizational Structure and Programmatic Reform in Public Child Protective Services Protocols and Training Standards: *Investigating Allegations of Child Sexual Abuse*

FOREWORD

The Washington Legislature, in its 1996 Supplemental Budget, directed the Washington State Institute for Public Policy to conduct a management project focused on the Division of Children and Family Services within Washington's Department of Social and Health Services. The governor vetoed this budget proviso and created a Management Improvement Project on this topic through the Office of Financial Management.

The Institute's Board of Directors determined that a critical review of other states' experiences in operating state-level services for children and families could help Washington's policymakers. The Institute contracted with a national expert, Charles Wilson, to conduct the study. Mr. Wilson, former Director of Family Services for Tennessee, has two decades' experience in the administration of child welfare programs and is a nationally regarded expert on issues of child abuse and neglect.

The consultant surveyed the 50 states regarding their organization of children and family services, then analyzed the responses and supplemented information from national sources. In addition, case studies were conducted using five states that have undergone recent organizational or programmatic reforms in the area of child protection. These states are: Florida, Iowa, Maryland, Missouri, and Tennessee.

The authors concluded the following:

- *No single organizational structure* holds a clear advantage over the other models. All have some distinct advantages and clear drawbacks.
- Reorganization is very costly and will distract staff from programmatic innovation and improvement. *Structural change* should, therefore, be undertaken only if the present structure is so dysfunctional that programmatic reform cannot be accomplished.
- The key to improving services lies in *leadership* and an *appropriate distribution of authority* in the organization. A strong regional system is a good compromise between state and local control.

In addition to the perspectives offered by this study, three additional projects will be presented to the 1997 Legislature. As a whole, these projects offer decision makers a rich analysis of existing practice and potential areas for reform. It is safe to say that no other state has comparable information on its child protection system and strategies to improve services. The three projects are:

- The *Management Improvement Project* under the direction of the Office of Financial Management recently completed their Phase One Tasks. The Deloitte and Touche Consulting Group has concluded a review of 300 case files, conducted focus groups throughout the state, and analyzed the structure and resources of the department.
- The *Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee* has conducted a performance audit of Child Protective Services, relying on the state's automated data base and interviews. Their preliminary report was completed in late December, with a final report expected in January 1997.
- The Governor's Office initiated a *Child Protection Services' Symposium* investigating new directions for the agency. This event was held in June 1996 and attended by a broad cross section of groups and individuals. An interdisciplinary work group reviewed findings and suggestions from the symposium; their report will be available in January 1997.