



RHODE ISLAND CHILD WELFARE FACTS

Approximately 3,000 children currently live in the legal custody of Rhode Island's Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF) due to reported or substantiated abuse or neglect.

DCYF is managed by the Rhode Island Executive Office of Health & Human Services. The Department operates four regional offices (known as Family Services Units), located in Providence, Bristol, North Kingstown, and Pawtucket. In addition, a statewide DCYF Adoptions Unit performs adoption-related functions. DCYF also contracts with private agencies in Rhode Island for the provision of foster care services, including the operation of shelters, group homes, residential treatment centers, and therapeutic foster homes.

SYSTEMIC PROBLEMS WITHIN DCYF

- **DCYF fails to protect children from abuse and neglect in foster care:**
 - In six of the seven years from 2000 through 2006, Rhode Island ranked worst state in the nation in its rate of maltreatment or neglect occurring to children in State foster care.
 - For years, children under the protection of the state in foster care custody in Rhode Island have suffered abuse or neglect at a higher rate than have children living in the state's general population.
- **DCYF fails to assess and address children's needs and fails to place them with families that can meet their basic needs and ensure their safety:** In all aspects of case planning and management, DCYF fails to exercise reasonable professional judgment. DCYF fails to identify children's safety, medical, mental health, education and permanency needs and fails to develop and implement plans to ensure that children and families receive necessary services to meet those needs.

DCYF does not develop case plans or choose placements for children on the basis of their individual situation. DCYF regularly places children in settings that are ill-suited to their individual needs.

As a result, these placements predictably disrupt, and DCYF shuffles children unnecessarily from one placement to another. With each successive inappropriate placement, children become increasingly damaged.

- **DCYF returns children to their parents without making a reasoned determination that the children will be safe, and without identifying or providing needed services:** More than 15 percent of the children entering Rhode Island foster care in the first quarter of 2006 had been in foster care less than a year earlier. This means that these children had been returned by the State to their parents, only to be abused or neglected again and returned to State foster care.
- **DCYF fails to engage in the planning necessary for children in their care to achieve permanency, causing many children to languish in foster care for years:** DCYF fails to plan for adoption in a timely manner when children cannot be safely returned home. DCYF frequently places children in institutions and with families that will not adopt. For children who cannot be reunified with their families, this effectively keeps children languishing in care with no move toward finding a permanent home.
- **DCYF fails to maintain an adequate number of foster homes, instead placing and leaving children in institutions simply because nothing else is available:** Federal law and reasonable professional standards require that children in foster care be placed in the least restrictive, most family-like setting suited to their needs. In Rhode Island, however, 35 percent to 40 percent of the children in State foster care custody live in expensive emergency shelters, group homes, and other institutions, many simply because Rhode Island has not developed more appropriate and less harmful placements for them. The rate at which Rhode Island institutionalizes children in its foster care custody is twice the national average of 19 percent. For children under 12, the rate is more than twice the national average. In 2004, Defendants placed 18.9 percent of children under 12 years old in foster care in group homes and institutions, more than twice the national median of 8.6 percent. Such placements are harmful, especially to young children, except in very rare cases.
- **DCYF assigns excessive caseloads to its caseworkers, making it impossible for them to visit the children in DCYF's custody:** Caseloads for DCYF workers far exceed reasonable professional standards. As a result, caseworkers make only a fraction of required visits with the children assigned to them. As of June 2007, only 39 percent of all Plaintiff Children had received a face-to-face visit with their caseworker within the previous 30 days. Without caseworkers visiting children on a regular basis, it is impossible for DCYF to ensure that children in foster care are safe and are having their basic needs met.
- **DCYF places children in unlicensed homes:** As of May 2007, 233 children in DCYF's legal custody were living in unlicensed foster homes. DCYF did not take reasonably necessary steps to ensure that these homes were safe and appropriate before leaving children in them.