



PROGRESS CONTINUES, BUT MORE TIME IS NEEDED

Experts Issue 8th Report on Compliance with Foster Care Targets

The national experts charged with assessing the Oklahoma Department of Human Services' progress toward achieving required outcomes for the state's foster care system, and make good faith efforts toward reaching those outcomes, issued their latest report on Friday. The results were mixed. The experts, called "Co-Neutrals," found that although the state is still far short of meeting the outcomes, it is making "good faith" efforts toward reaching the goals in many of the areas. But the experts found that more time is needed.

However, in the important areas of developing new therapeutic foster homes and in ensuring placement stability, the Co-Neutrals reserved judgment, rather than issuing a good faith finding. With regard to permanency for older youth, the Co-Neutrals found that the Department had once again failed to even achieve good faith efforts to achieve progress toward the targeted outcomes. The Co-Neutrals also found that the Department had still failed to meet the targeted outcomes, which are overdue.

In most of the areas the Co-Neutrals found that the Department was making good faith efforts to work toward targeted outcomes but that it had not yet reached those negotiated goals.

Oklahoma's foster care system remains under a court-ordered settlement agreement entered in January 2011, in which the state agreed to meet targeted numerical goals in specified areas within five years. However, the settlement was extended by agreement of the parties in September 2016.

"The Co-Neutrals urge Oklahoma's leaders to stay the course in funding the core strategies that will drive lasting child welfare improvements forward in a sustainable way," the report noted. "This includes the commitments to ensure that DHS has a sufficient number of well-trained and well supported foster homes and an adequate number of caseworkers and other key staff to achieve better outcomes for children. Any reversal in support could substantially compromise the still tenuous foundation upon which DHS has sought to build this reform, and undermine years of public investment from the Oklahoma Legislature."

Under the terms of the settlement agreement, the state must achieve a good faith finding in all of the 21 target areas, and maintain that standard for a continuous period of two years.

“We are glad to see continued progress,” said Marcia Robinson Lowry, lead counsel for Plaintiffs, “but somewhat dismayed that so little progress has been made in some of the areas, with new strategies still being developed after such a long time.”

“We should thank the hard work DHS has put into the efforts,” commented Fred Dorwart, local counsel for the foster children, “while ensuring that Oklahomans do not slip back to the prior error of accepting effort in lieu of achievement.”

#

A Better Childhood is a national nonprofit advocacy organization that uses the courts to reform dysfunctional child welfare systems around the country. Marcia Robinson Lowry, A Better Childhood’s executive director, has been lead counsel in the *D.G. v. Yarborough* lawsuit since the case was filed in 2008.



1095 Hardscrabble Rd
Chappaqua NY 10514
844-422-2425

www.ABetterChildhood.org
media@ABetterChildhood.org