



October 2013
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AGENCY REVIEW

BUREAU FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN RESOURCES

AUDIT OVERVIEW

The Bureau for Children and Families Needs to Establish Adequate and Uniform Safety Measures Statewide for Child Protective Services Workers When Services Are Delivered Outside the Office



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This evaluation of the Bureau for Children and Families (BCF) is part of the agency review of the Department of Health and Human Resources, as authorized by *West Virginia Code* §4-10-8(b)(5). During interviews by the audit team with CPS workers in district offices, CPS workers expressed safety concerns about working with clients when outside the BCF offices. This audit explores the agency's current approach to CPS worker safety when delivering services in the field. The findings of the report are indicated below.

Issue 1: The Bureau for Children and Families Needs to Establish Adequate and Uniform Safety Measures Statewide for Child Protective Services Workers When Services Are Delivered Outside the Office.

Report Highlights

- The nature of CPS work requires that workers meet with clients in their homes at all hours of the day and night to investigate allegations of neglect or abuse, assess child safety in the home and provide services. These locations outside the office are unpredictable and often unsafe, resulting in threats to personal safety.
- While the BCF has taken some measures to protect CPS workers, these measures originate from various offices and levels of authority and consequently are fragmented, lack statewide uniformity, and in some cases are inadequate. A personal safety device providing a Global Positioning System (GPS) location, two-way communication and monitoring of workers in the field, has been discussed since 2009, but has not been purchased.
- The BCF does not have a central, uniform component in its organizational structure to promote a culture of safety, whether that be through centralized and statewide policy directives, a central office focused on safety, or a central safety officer in DHHR or the BCF.

PERD Evaluation of the Agency's Written Response

The Office of the Legislative Auditor's Performance Evaluation and Research Division received the Department of Health and Human Resources' response on October 16, 2013. The DHHR generally concurred with the findings and recommendations and indicated that it has taken immediate action to implement the recommendations. The agency also listed additional changes that DHHR and the BCF have taken to focus on the safety of all employees who work in the field. The agency response can be found in Appendix C.

Recommendations

1. *The Department of Health and Human Resources, in conjunction with the Bureau for Children and Families, should increase its focus on worker safety and create a culture that emphasizes worker safety through creating a central and uniform focus on safety.*
2. *The Bureau for Children and Families should avoid any further delays in providing personal safety devices for all CPS workers, and develop a statewide, uniform practice of their use.*
3. *The Bureau for Children and Families should identify areas of weak/nonexistent mobile phone coverage and explore the use of other communication technology such as radio transmitters.*
4. *The Bureau for Children and Families should provide agency mobile phones to all field workers and require their use for state business conducted from remote locations.*
5. *The Bureau for Children and Families should provide methamphetamine safety training and establish stringent methamphetamine safety guidelines for social workers.*
6. *The Bureau for Children and Families should require safety training annually.*

ISSUE1

The Bureau for Children and Families Needs to Establish Adequate and Uniform Safety Measures Statewide for Child Protective Services Workers When Services Are Delivered Outside the Office.

Issue Summary

The nature of the work of Child Protective Services requires that workers meet with clients in their homes to investigate allegations of neglect or abuse, assess child safety in the home and to provide services. These locations outside the office are unpredictable and often unsafe. Some situations encountered by workers are potentially dangerous to the client and to the worker. In 2008 a social worker providing contracted services for the Bureau for Children and Families (BCF) program “Right from the Start” was murdered during a home visit.

The BCF has taken measures to protect CPS workers; however, these measures are fragmented and lack statewide uniformity...

The BCF has taken measures to protect CPS workers; however, these measures are fragmented, lack statewide uniformity, and in some cases are inadequate, particularly when CPS workers are outside of the office to conduct home visits. In interviews with several child protective service workers, they indicated concerns to the Performance Evaluation and Research Division (PERD) about their personal safety and the agency’s response to safety. Each local office has security protocols but the level of physical security varies from one county office to another. In some offices, safety and security protocols are not written. The BCF needs to improve its statewide organizational culture to promote consistent personal safety and security, particularly for CPS staff working outside local offices. The Legislative Auditor further argues that the inadequate priority on CPS worker safety by the BCF may be a contributing factor in the relatively high turnover rate of CPS workers and trainees.

The BCF needs to improve its statewide organizational culture to promote consistent personal safety and security, particularly for CPS staff working outside local offices.

Employers Have a Duty to Provide a Violence-Free Workplace

Employers have a duty to provide a safe workplace for public and private employees. State employees are protected by West Virginia Code §21-3-1 which requires that

“Every employer shall furnish employment which shall be reasonably safe for employees therein engaged and shall furnish and use safety devices and safeguards, and shall adopt and use methods and processes reasonably adequate to render employment and the place of employment safe,”

The federal government has mandated safety protections for private employees. The Occupational Safety Health Act of 1970 mandates that all employers have a general duty to provide their employees with a workplace free from recognized hazards likely to cause death or serious physical harm (Public Law 91-596; as amended by Public Law 101-552, Section 3101). Employers can be cited for violating this “General Duty” clause if there is a recognized hazard of *workplace violence* and they do nothing to prevent or abate it. Workplace violence is defined as violent acts (including physical assaults and threats of assaults) directed toward persons at work or on duty. The DHHR has responded to the federal safety standard and state Code mandate with the adoption of the Division of Personnel’s Workplace Security policy, and a separate work environment policy.

Policy Memorandum 2123

The Department of Health and Human Resources adopted a revised Violent/Hostile Work Environment policy on July 1, 2011. The policy’s purpose is to establish a “policy of zero tolerance for workplace violence and/or creating a hostile working environment. This policy includes incidents occurring on or off state property.” The policy is written to include any person (client, customer, etc.) who exhibits threatening, hostile or abusive behavior and also states that all employees have a responsibility to report any incidents of workplace violence. The policy includes a telephone number to call to report incidents. DHHR indicated that no reports have been received in the past two years regarding incidents that have taken place outside of its offices. In addition to the Violent/Hostile Work Environment policy, the Bureau for Children and Families has security measures in place for its 54 human services offices. The security measures often limit access into some DHHR offices and/or through some DHHR offices. The BCF is currently reviewing its county offices to determine the condition of the buildings to allow additional security measures.

The DHHR has responded to the federal safety standard and state Code mandate with the adoption of the Division of Personnel’s Workplace Security policy and an internal hostile work environment policy.

PERD staff interviewed several CPS workers who expressed safety concerns in performing their duties outside of the office.

CPS Workers in the Field Are Not in a Secure Setting

The Bureau for Children and Families has created district and county offices that have some physical security measures in place. However, when child protective service workers go into the field to investigate neglect and abuse reports, visit and transport clients, they are no longer working in a secure physical setting. PERD staff interviewed several CPS workers who expressed safety concerns in performing their duties outside of the office. These workers do not feel safety training is adequate. They reported that they have been threatened, had their property damaged and have been stalked. In addition, CPS workers indicated that

their families and loved ones express ongoing concerns related to their safety, and often state that they wish they had a different job.

While rare, social workers have been killed while investigating reports of child abuse and neglect, supervising parent-child visits or providing other client services outside of their offices. Social worker deaths occurred in Massachusetts, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky and West Virginia between 2000 and 2011. In terms of workplace violence, social workers in the field more often experience verbal abuse, threats of physical abuse, and minor physical assaults. In 2009, the West Virginia chapter of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) conducted a group discussion with social workers attending a conference and collected answers from a survey on workplace violence¹. Of the participants, 88.6 percent indicated that they had experienced an incident that they considered a threat to personal safety in which they felt compromised. They reported being:

- pushed and shoved;
- assaulted in front of a county court house;
- shot at with archery equipment;
- hit by beer bottles;
- threatened verbally with bombs, severe physical assault or death; and,
- threatened physically with hand guns, and knives.

These incidents may not have been formally reported by the social worker. Experts studying the issue of social work workplace violence note that many cases of workplace violence go unreported or underreported, and some agencies do not have a systematic way of reporting incidents of violence or a standardized form on which to make reports. Consequently, agencies operate in ignorance, staff is placed at risk of future violence and administrators do not create safety procedures for workers in the field.

International Association of Social Workers Recently Issued Safety Guidelines

The NASW is a large international organization for professional social workers. The NASW, responding to “the increasingly unpredictable and often unsafe environment for social work practice,” issued workplace guidelines and standards for social worker safety in the Spring of 2013. As these guidelines constitute best practices, and discuss safety in the

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¹ These social workers were employed in both the public and private sectors within the state.

context of providing social work services, the Office of the Legislative Auditor used the following standards to assess the safety efforts of the Bureau for Children and Families.

- Agencies that employ social workers should establish and maintain an organizational culture that promotes safety and security for their staff. This includes: oral and written safety policies; safety committees providing oversight and review of policies, protocols and physical safety and risk assessment; data management and reporting activities.
- Agency office environments should promote safety.
- Agency technology should be used appropriately and effectively to minimize risk.
- Social workers should be provided with mobile phones to promote their safety in the field.
- Social workers should assess and take steps to reduce their risk of violence prior to each field visit.
- Social workers should engage in comprehensive reporting practices regarding field visits.
- Agencies that employ social workers should develop protocols to follow when an incidence of violence or abuse is reported.
- Social workers should participate in annual training that develops and maintains their ability to practice safely.

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BCF Organizational Structure Does Not Emphasize Safety

The first NASW safety standard is perhaps the most important, and that is that employers of social workers establish and maintain an organizational culture that promotes safety. Safety for BCF is the responsibility of two DHHR offices in two divisions, operations and human resources, and is split between physical safety (eg. fire safety, vehicular safety) and personnel safety.

The BCF has engaged in a number of safety initiatives since the death of a contracted social worker in 2008, but these safety concerns and initiatives have been directed by various levels of authority. Regional directors make some resource decisions; however, resources are not provided uniformly to all CPS workers. State vehicles are limited and not always available for use by CPS workers. Decisions relating to office security are tied to the design and age of local facilities. Community service managers (CSMs) in charge of district offices establish safety committees at the direction of regional directors, and promote safety awareness at the local level. The DHHR's Office for Human Resources Management (OHRM) receives some types of incident reports and

provides some safety-related training. However, the Legislative Auditor concludes that the BCF, while concerned as an agency about CPS worker safety, does not have a central, uniform component in its organizational structure to promote a culture of safety, whether that be through centralized and statewide policy directives, a central office focused on safety, or a central safety officer in DHHR or the BCF.

Without centralized and statewide policy directives focused on CPS worker safety, there is inconsistency and a lack of uniformity in the application of safety practices and protocols throughout the Bureau. There is no designated person responsible exclusively for safety within the BCF. When the Office of the Legislative Auditor began to inquire about safety issues, direction was made to one person employed as a loss control manager and also responsible for disability, attendance, and safety in the OHRM. His position as safety and loss control manager in OHRM is the only centralized position relating to personnel safety. His job duties are primarily with leaves of absences, attendance patterns, workers compensation and restricted duty claims. He also assists with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliance. He is not involved with specific safety policies established by the DHHR bureaus. Even though “safety” is one word of the loss control manager’s job title, it relates more to worker accommodation and productivity than worker on-the-job safety. **The DHHR or the BCF needs to establish comprehensive, centralized and agency-wide protocols for the safety of CPS workers.**

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BCF’s Provisions of Safety Resources for CPS Workers Are Inconsistent

The BCF provides some resources designed to enhance social worker safety when not in the office. PERD reviewed the availability and use of safety resources for CPS workers providing services in the field.

Mobile Phones

Mobile phones can be used to enhance CPS worker safety, particularly when they are equipped with GPS locator capability, and handled unobtrusively by the worker. **The BCF provides state-issued mobile phones to CPS workers, but the phones are at the option of CPS workers and many decide to use their personal phone instead.** Furthermore, through interviews, the Legislative Auditor found that some CPS workers are using personal mobile phones to receive, store and transmit client information (names, addresses and the nature of the complaint), text client information, or take photos to document home

The Legislative Auditor found that some CPS workers are using personal mobile phones to receive, store and transmit client information (names, addresses and the nature of the complaint), text client information, or take photos to document home conditions or injuries while on the job at remote locations.

conditions or injuries while on the job at remote locations. This is in violation of DHHR and state policies, which states that state-owned portable devices should be used to conduct state business from a remote location. In addition, using personal phones to conduct CPS work runs the risk of CPS workers breaching the security of confidential client information. Since state-issued mobile phones are optional for CPS workers, the BCF is not using them as a uniform safety measure. Moreover, the use of personal mobile phones to conduct CPS work is inappropriate. **The DHHR needs to establish agency-wide policy on the use of mobile phones that is enforced consistently throughout the state in order to maximize the benefits of them and to ensure their appropriate use.**

In addition, rural states such as West Virginia often have limited mobile phone coverage or “dead zones” where mobile phones do not function. A safety report to the Washington State Legislature on safety for field workers recommended identifying geographical areas where mobile phones do not work, and exploring the use of other technology such as radios.

Vehicles

The official Department of Personnel job description for trainee and CPS worker positions states: “Work requires the use of personal automobile for extensive travel.” While each of the 54 human services offices has at least one state vehicle and access to rental vehicles, most CPS workers use their own vehicles for routine field work during the work day and during evening and week-end “on-call” hours. The state-owned or rental vehicles may be used for trips over longer distances.

Regional directors indicated that staff may choose to use their personal vehicles for routine field work but do not have to do so. CPS workers often find that state or rental vehicles are not available because of limited supply and so generally use their personal vehicles. **This can create personal vulnerability for workers who often reside in the same county or community as clients being investigated.** The safety report to the Washington State Legislature also noted that “When workers use their personal vehicles while conducting investigations and home visits, their license plate numbers may be used to obtain further identifying information, including their home address. There have ... been instances where social workers, driving their own vehicles, have been followed by clients or other individuals.”

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Personal safety devices

Since 2009 BCF officials have discussed obtaining personal safety devices for CPS workers in the field and attempted to purchase such devices. Personal safety devices can provide a Global Positioning System (GPS) location, two-way communication and monitoring for workers in the field. BCF officials are moving toward purchasing some type of personal safety device incorporating these features. The Interim Commissioner for Field Operations indicated that the BCF is prioritizing providing safety devices and intends to field-test a safety device starting in October 2013. **The BCF needs to avoid any further delays in providing safety devices for every CPS worker and establish uniform policies in their use.** Such devices will be the primary protection CPS workers will have in the field. CPS workers are not allowed to carry personal protections such as pepper spray, sticks or mace against animal or human attacks.

Personal safety devices can provide a Global Positioning System (GPS) location, two-way communication and monitoring for workers in the field. Such devices will be the primary protection CPS workers will have in the field.

Safety training

The BCF has a division of training that provides training for all new and tenured workers in all of the BCF human services and family assistance programs. The DHHR requires that all department employees complete mandatory online personal safety training offered through OHRM. This training has learning objectives to understand client anger, examine the uses of different levels of authority, recognize risk factors associated with client contacts, use precaution during home visits, plan for safe client visits and identify cues of escalating situations. The training documents emphasize the importance of assessing the worker's safety risk before making a home visit. In 2013, the DHHR/BCF contracted with the Department of Corrections to provide Defensive Tactics Training for 200 CPS staff members. This training offers skills in threat assessment, environmental awareness and close quarter self-defense. Officials indicate that this training will also be offered in 2014.

The BCF...has identified the need for meth labs safety training, but currently does not provide this training.

More general training that relates to safety is offered by OHRM to managers and supervisors. This training includes conflict resolution, dealing with difficult people, crucial conversations and policy acumen. Supervisors can also take courses from the Division of Personnel.

The Office of the Legislative Auditor inquired about specific safety training for workers encountering methamphetamine (meth) labs. BCF replied that the agency has identified the need for this training but currently does not provide training specifically on meth lab safety. Such training was offered several years ago through the West Virginia Prosecuting Attorneys Institute via grant funding that the Institute received. General

substance-abuse training is provided to child welfare workers but it is not specific to meth lab safety. The Office of the Legislative Auditor notes that such training is offered by other states to their child welfare workers. Workers need to be taught about methamphetamine safety relating to personal exposure, response to clients in a methamphetamine environment and the handling of physical exposure (worker and client's clothing, car contamination, transportation of children out of meth lab environments).

Safety Protocols

PERD was not able to find a general BCF safety policy or BCF written safety protocols relating to the actions of BCF workers in the field. Case work safety practices are incorporated in training for workers and supervisors but not issued as detailed safety protocols by the BCF. However, BCF district offices follow some protocols developed for office security which also ensure a level of worker safety in field. These generally include the following:

- The district office maintains sign-out sheets and schedules when workers go into the field on home visits.
- The supervisor maintains telephone contact with workers out of the office.
- The supervisor involves law enforcement assistance when the supervisor determines that this assistance is necessary.

These protocols are in practice but not written in some offices. A CSM indicated to the Office of the Legislative Auditor that his district office is currently putting these protocols in writing as part of the office safety planning. One of the four regional directors indicated a concern that protocols for tracking workers in the field are not well-defined in many offices, and time may lapse before a supervisor realizes that a worker in the field is not in contact. An additional concern that was raised is that communication between the worker and the office may be difficult due to dead zones for mobile phone coverage.

A Uniform and Adequate Focus on Safety Needs to Be Developed

In order to develop a strong safety culture for CPS workers, the DHHR in conjunction with the BCF needs to provide a uniform and adequate focus on safety throughout the CPS program. The agency may

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already have enough resources and manpower to provide this focus. The safety focus could be established through the leadership of a central safety officer or by establishing statewide policy directives that are practiced consistently and uniformly within the CPS program. In any event, the agency needs to emphasize safety and tie together safety initiatives that are currently initiated from OHRM or DHHR operations through the BCF commissioners, training division, regional directors, community service managers and local supervisors. A centralized safety initiative could also facilitate the evaluation of local office security and assist local offices where security gaps are identified; evaluate, establish and schedule safety training and re-training, especially when training involves outside agencies or vendors; review oral and written safety policies, safety protocols and staff safety risk assessments; gather incident data and provide data management and reporting; and assist and re-activate local safety committees when requested. In short, DHHR needs to maintain a consistent and uniform focus on safety for all social work practices in the agency.

DHHR needs to maintain a consistent and uniform focus on safety for all social work practices in the agency.

Conclusion

The work of child protective services can be dangerous and requires a consistent focus on CPS worker safety in the field. While DHHR and BCF have a number of safety resources and other initiatives in place, the application of these initiatives is fragmented, inconsistent, and inadequate. Facility security varies from location to location. In addition, personal safety training for meth lab exposure has not been a priority of the agency. Safety resources such as state vehicles and mobile phones are not uniformly available to all CPS workers, and implementing personal safety devices has been in the planning stages for several years. All of this may lead workers to have a sense that upper management lacks concern for CPS worker safety. The Office of the Legislative Auditor issued a department review in August 2013 that found a 54 percent turnover rate of CPS trainees statewide in 2012. **It is possible that the danger inherent in the job position and the lack of a safety culture have contributed to the turnover of CPS workers and trainees.** DHHR needs to provide uniform leadership to establish and maintain an ongoing focus on safety for CPS workers in the field.

Safety resources such as state vehicles and mobile phones are not uniformly available to all CPS workers, and implementing personal safety devices has been in the planning stages for several years. This may lead workers to have a sense that upper management lacks concern for CPS worker safety.

Recommendations

1. *The Department of Health and Human Resources, in conjunction with the Bureau for Children and Families, should increase its focus on worker safety and create a culture that emphasizes worker safety through creating a central and uniform focus on safety.*

2. *The Bureau for Children and Families should avoid any further delays in providing personal safety devices for all CPS workers, and develop a statewide, uniform practice of their use.*
3. *The Bureau for Children and Families should identify areas of weak/nonexistent mobile phone coverage and explore the use of other communication technology such as radio transmitters.*
4. *The Bureau for Children and Families should provide agency mobile phones to all field workers and require their use for state business conducted from remote locations.*
5. *The Bureau for Children and Families should provide methamphetamine safety training and establish stringent methamphetamine safety guidelines for social workers.*
6. *The Bureau for Children and Families should require safety training annually.*

Appendix A Transmittal Letter

WEST VIRGINIA LEGISLATURE *Performance Evaluation and Research Division*

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John Sylvia
Director

October 4, 2013

Ms. Karen L. Bowling, Cabinet Secretary
West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources
One Davis Square, Suite 100 East
Charleston, West Virginia 25301

Dear Secretary Bowling:

This is to transmit a draft copy of the department review of Department of Health and Human Resources, Bureau for Children and Families. This report is scheduled to be presented during the October 21-23 interim meetings of the Joint Committee on Government Operations, and the Joint Committee on Government Organization. We will inform you of the exact time and location once the information becomes available. It is expected that a representative from your agency be present at the meeting to orally respond to the report and answer any questions the committees may have.

We need to schedule an exit conference to discuss any concerns you may have with the report. We would like to have the meeting on October 9, 2013. Please notify us to schedule the exact time or another day if October 9 is not convenient. In addition, we need your written response by noon on October 15, 2013 in order for it to be included in the final report. If your agency intends to distribute additional material to committee members at the meeting, please contact the House Government Organization staff at 340-3192 by Thursday, October 17, 2013 to make arrangements.

We request that your personnel not disclose the report to anyone not affiliated with your agency. Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,


John Sylvia

c: Brian Cassis, Director, Office of Internal Control and Policy Development
Nancy Exline, Interim Deputy Commissioner Field Operations, BCF

Enclosure

Joint Committee on Government and Finance

Appendix B

Objective, Scope and Methodology

The Performance Evaluation and Research Division (PERD) within the Office of the Legislative Auditor evaluated the Bureau for Children and Families (BCF) as part of the agency review of the Department of Health and Human Resources (DHHR) as required under *WV Code* §4-10-8.

Objective

The Office of the Legislative Auditor issued an audit in August 2013 that examined the Bureau of Children and Family's management of its labor resources and determined that in 2012 the Bureau experienced a 54 percent turnover (separation) rate of CPS workers in the first year of employment. In interviews with CPS workers in district offices it became apparent that CPS workers did not feel safe when conducting their duties in the field, and expressed concerns to the audit team. The audit team wanted to determine the level of adequacy of the agency's understanding of worker's safety needs and the provision of safety training and resources to workers providing services in the field.

Scope

The scope of this audit focused primarily on information pertaining to the safety needs of the CPS workforce required to make home visits. This issue examined the current climate of safety in the BCF through a review of the agency efforts from 2009 to 2013 to obtain a personal safety device for CPS workers and to provide safety training and other safety resources such as mobile phones and state vehicles, agency safety policies, office security, safety committees, and safety protocols. This issue used the current safety guidelines for field worker safety issued by the National Association of Social Workers to assess the agency's safety culture.

Methodology

PERD gathered and analyzed several sources of information and conducted audit procedures to assess the sufficiency and appropriateness of the information used as audit evidence. The principal methods used to examine report issues included interviews, and documentation review. This information and the audit procedures are described below.

1. Interviews. Testimonial evidence gathered for this review through interviews with the DHHR and BCF staff and other entities was confirmed by written statements and in some cases by corroborating evidence. PERD staff visited the agency's main office in Charleston, WV and met with staff. Interviews with agency and department staff were a means of learning about the agency's measurements, processes and decisions. PERD staff also visited two district offices and met with agency staff in those offices. Key BCF staff interviewed included the BCF Interim Deputy Commissioner of Field Operations, all four BCF regional directors, and Child Protective Services (CPS) workers and supervisors in 2 of the 30 CPS districts. PERD staff also interviewed a community service manager in Region 4, and the Disability, Attendance, Safety and Loss Control Manager for the agency's department. PERD staff reviewed testimony made by the agency during a legislative hearing on agency safety, and interviewed the chief executive officer of the West Virginia Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers.

2. Documentation Review. PERD staff reviewed a variety of agency documents including its CPS policy manual, training materials, safety and office security policies, and Office of Technology and DHHR technology policies. PERD staff obtained and reviewed the form used by county offices to document hostile client actions, and the incident reporting database employed by DHHR to track worker's compensation claims.

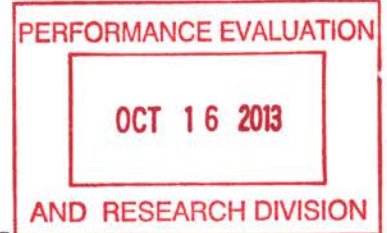
3. Research. PERD staff reviewed child protective services safety manuals from other states, reports of social worker deaths, reports of social worker safety in the field, reports of safety committees to other states' legislatures, National Association of Social Worker best practices, and federal and West Virginia safety requirements.

This performance review was conducted in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards (GAGAS). GAGAS requires that the audit is planned and performed to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. The Legislative Auditor believes that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for the report's findings and conclusions based on the audit objectives.

Appendix C Agency Response



**STATE OF WEST VIRGINIA
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN RESOURCES**



Earl Ray Tomblin
Governor

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Karen L. Bowling
Cabinet Secretary

October 16, 2013

John Sylvia, Director
West Virginia Legislature
Performance Evaluation and Research Division
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Charleston, West Virginia 25305

Dear Mr. Sylvia:

The West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources has reviewed the draft copy of the assessment conducted by the Legislative Auditor's Office Performance and Evaluation and Research relating to Child Protective Services.

Attached is our response to the issue of worker safety and the recommendations presented in the report.

At this time, we would like to thank the West Virginia Legislative Auditor's Office Performance and Evaluation and Research staff for their time and efforts to provide this review of our practices concerning the safety of our employees.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Nancy N. Exline".

Nancy N. Exline
Commissioner

NNE:bpb

cc: Cabinet Secretary Karen L. Bowling
Brian Cassis

Issue 1: The Bureau for Children and Families Needs to Establish Adequate and Statewide Uniform Safety Measures for Child Protective Service Workers When Services Are Delivered Outside the Office.

- 1- The Department of Health and Human Resources and the Bureau for Children and Families (BCF) have taken several steps to focus on the safety of all employees who work in local offices and where the nature of their work requires the employee to work in the field. The partnerships between the DHHR Office of Human Resource Management (OHRM); the DHHR Office of Operations: Safety, Security, and Loss Management, and the Bureau for Children and Families have produced the following changes in our continuing focus on creating a central and uniform focus on safety.
 - A. The DHHR conducted a survey of BCF [August/September 2013] to collect information that will be utilized to develop a BCF Physical Security Plan for all district/field offices. Survey questions concentrated on the following areas:
 - General location information
 - Building specific information
 - Employee, visitor, client and customer information
 - Emergency services information
 - Security guard information
 - Insurance needs and coverage
 - B. In August a joint team from BCF Field Operations and OHRM developed an online survey for all Social Service Staff in BCF completed in September. This information is being used to develop safety protocols, employee retention initiatives, and additional safety training. The Survey questions concentrated on the following areas:
 - Safety while carrying out my job duties
 - Reason employees leave DHHR
 - How to make workers feel safer
 - Effectiveness of Supervisors
 - C. Safety Officers have been named at both the DHHR and BCF level effective October 1, 2013. Andy Garretson, OHRM Employee Management and Jason Workman, BCF Human Resources have taken the role to provide oversight of all employee safety issues. As a result of these newly named Safety Officers the following has and will take place in BCF:
 - All local offices conducted staff meetings to cover how to report an accident or incident that could occur either in the field or at a local office. Common Chapters Office Security 1200 was covered concerning Hostile Client Action Forms and the development of plans for dealing with Hostile situations in and outside of local offices.
 - All accident/incident reports will be sent to the BCF Safety Officer, Jason Workman. A monthly, quarterly, and annual report will be

developed and reviewed by the BCF Leadership Team. These reports will be provided to the DHHR Safety Officer.

D. A Bureau Safety Procedures Guidebook for field work is currently in a draft format that will be distributed to all field staff before the end of October. This Guidebook will focus on the following areas:

- Local Safety Committees
- Mapping of Cell Phone Coverage in weak/nonexistent areas
- Safety Training
- Contact with Supervisor
- Cell Phones
- State Owned Cars and Rental Cars
- Safety Devices
- Law Enforcement

2- The Bureau for Children and Families will be moving forward with two Proof of Concept (POC) Projects concerning personal safety devices for Child Protective Service Workers. Both device projects will have uniform practice and standard procedures developed. At the completion of both projects an assessment of the devices and an analysis of the cost will be developed.

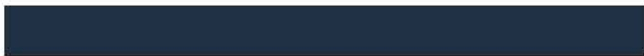
- The first project will be a joint effort between DHHR Management Information Services (MIS) and BCF Field Operations. This project will begin in the month of October 2013 with thirty-five employees statewide using a Samsung device. This device will allow a worker to enter contacts concerning their visit, take photographs, videos, instant message with a supervisor, GPS locator and has the ability to send an alert to someone concerning their safety.
- The second project will be a joint effort between OHRM and BCF Field Operations. This project will be started in November 2013 with workers in four districts with the worst cell phone coverage. This device allows an employee to press a button on an id badge that alerts a call center who can listen into the situation to determine if law enforcement is needed at the location. The project will determine where boosters are needed in these counties to allow additional coverage. The proof of concept will be conducted with Solo Protect Company.

3- The Bureau for Children and Families is in the process of conducting an inventory of all current cell phones. This inventory will be used to develop a strategic plan along with the assessment of personal safety devices to determine the best possible solution for all BCF employees working in the field. DHHR MIS will be working to coordinate new policies to address issues related to the use of personal cell phones. Until a policy is released Regional Directors have instructed our employees to not take photographs or text confidential information on their own personal cell phones.

4- The Bureau for Children and Families has developed a Safety Training Work Group that has reviewed all current safety training within the Bureau and the

Defensive Safety Tactics Course OHRM/BCF contracted with Department of Corrections in 2013. The following will be put into place over the course of the next thirty days.

- Safety Awareness Seminars will be scheduled regionally concerning Methamphetamine, Bath Salts, K2 and other illegal and prescription drugs encountered by field staff. The first will take place in November 2013 and will be an ongoing training to meet the needs of all employees now and ongoing.
 - BCF will coordinate with Andy Garretson at OHRM to schedule additional Defensive Safety Tactics Courses for 2014.
 - An additional online course is being developed for new workers to be used during the BCF orientation for new employees discussing both in office and field safety.
 - All safety courses are being placed online for line supervisors to use during unit meetings.
- 5- The Office of Human Resources and Management (OHRM) is developing an annual training course for all DHHR Employees that will have general safety measures and sections specific to individual bureaus.



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