



Response to the
Independent Living Services Advisory Council
2015 Annual Report

Department of Children and Families

December 18, 2015

Mike Carroll
Secretary

Rick Scott
Governor

Florida Statutes established the Independent Living Services Advisory Council, and mandates the issuance of an annual report from the Council, as well as a response from the Department of Children and Families.

Statutory Authority:

409.1451

(7) INDEPENDENT LIVING SERVICES ADVISORY COUNCIL.—The secretary of the Department of Children and Families shall establish the Independent Living Services Advisory Council for the purpose of reviewing and making recommendations concerning the implementation and operation of the provisions of s. 39.6251 and the Road-to-Independence Program. This advisory council shall continue to function as specified in this subsection until the Legislature determines that the advisory council can no longer provide a valuable contribution to the department's efforts to achieve the goals of the services designed to enable a young adult to live independently.

(a) The advisory council shall assess the implementation and operation of the Road-to-Independence Program and advise the department on actions that would improve the ability of these Road-to-Independence Program services to meet the established goals. The advisory council shall keep the department informed of problems being experienced with the services, barriers to the effective and efficient integration of services and support across systems, and successes that the system of services has achieved. The department shall consider, but is not required to implement, the recommendations of the advisory council.

(b) The advisory council shall report to the secretary on the status of the implementation of the Road-to-Independence Program, efforts to publicize the availability of the Road-to-Independence Program, the success of the services, problems identified, recommendations for department or legislative action, and the department's implementation of the recommendations contained in the Independent Living Services Integration Workgroup Report submitted to the appropriate substantive committees of the legislature by December 31, 2013. **The department shall submit a report by December 31 of each year to the Governor, the President of the Senate, and the Speaker of the House of Representatives which includes a summary of the factors reported on by the council and identifies the recommendations of the advisory council and either describes the department's actions to implement the recommendations or provides the department's rationale for not implementing the recommendations.**

(c) Members of the advisory council shall be appointed by the secretary of the department. The membership of the advisory council must include, at a minimum, representatives from the headquarters and district offices of the Department of Children and Families, community-based care lead agencies, the Department of Juvenile Justice,

the Department of Economic Opportunity, the Department of Education, the Agency for Health Care Administration, the State Youth Advisory Board, CareerSource Florida, Inc., the Statewide Guardian Ad Litem Office, foster parents, recipients of services and funding through the Road-to-Independence Program, and advocates for children in care. The secretary shall determine the length of the term to be served by each member appointed to the advisory council, which may not exceed 4 years.

(d) The department shall provide administrative support to the Independent Living Services Advisory Council to accomplish its assigned tasks. The advisory council shall be afforded access to all appropriate data from the department, each community-based care lead agency, and other relevant agencies in order to accomplish the tasks set forth in this section. The data collected may not include any information that would identify a specific child or young adult.

Recommendations by the Independent Living Services Council for the Florida Department of Children and Families

As required by statute, the Department is submitting the following response to the recommendations for the Department of Children and Families contained in the Independent Living Services Advisory Council's 2015 report. The council made recommendations in four (4) content areas: Internet Access, Quality Assurance, Employment, and Legislative Recommendations.

Internet Access

Children in foster care should be educated in internet safety and provided internet access. This issue is critical as internet access is necessary in our daily lives, including employment purposes and on-going education. Further, the administration of the Florida My Services survey, which is web-based, requires our teens to have access over time to complete one or two modules at a time. This is necessary to provide a thoughtful, rather than rushed, response to the survey questions.

DCF Response

The Department recognizes the emerging risks from the internet facing our youth today, as well as the importance in having internet access. The Department has proposed new rule language for 65C-14 adding internet safety to the provision of life skills by group home caregivers. In addition, the Department will explore partnering with the Quality Parenting Initiative on the development of web-based foster parent training. Each Community Based Care Lead Agency is responsible for the provision of an adequate service array and for leveraging partnerships with local agencies and businesses, which may include free or low cost internet access.

Quality Assurance

The Legislature must ensure that DCF has adequate funds to fulfill its oversight responsibilities. DCF must restore a robust quality assurance/quality improvement process and employ enough contract management in the district and central office staff to do the job. The legislature should reinstate the QA/CQI positions at DCF to ensure that DCF can fulfill its obligations.

DCF Response

Although there have been reductions to the Department's QA full time equivalent (FTE) positions, the Department has continued to oversee QA activities for children in out-of-home care through contractual requirements with the CBC managing entities. CBCs are required to maintain an internal QA/QI system and there are approximately 81 QA positions within the CBCs. Florida approaches QA/QI activities through standardized case reviews and CBCs conduct weekly and monthly operations data reviews using ad hoc reports from FSFN and the CBC scorecard. CBCs utilize a standardized review instrument developed by the Administration for Children and Families to conduct case reviews of 1,356 cases annually in the areas of safety, permanency and child well-being. CBCs are also required to utilize the federal data portal assigned to Florida to capture case review findings. This approach ensures a formal statewide system of oversight and accountability that measures child welfare practice for case management services. The state office is responsible for establishing CQI requirements and providing training to QA staff. Regions and CBCs are required to develop quarterly schedules and to conduct case reviews for all cases identified in the sample each quarter.

The Department recently began implementation of the Results-Oriented Accountability (ROA) Program. The purpose of the ROA system is to develop mechanisms to monitor and measure the use of Child Welfare resources, the quality and amount of services, and child and family outcomes, including youth using both quantitative and qualitative data. By taking a more complete view of all entities charged with responsibility of achieving the statutory outcomes, establishing appropriately defined outcome measures, measuring and analyzing the results, assigning corresponding accountability, and connecting results with actions, Florida has the platform to fundamentally shape policy and create innovative practices informed by evidence. For the purposes of the Program, the collective roles of the Department, CBC lead agencies, communities, providers, contractors, other state agencies, Tribes and the Judiciary defines the Florida Child Welfare Community (Child Welfare Community). The Program will allow the Child Welfare Community to take a long-term view, and to confirm with evidence the interventions used are efficacious and effective in realizing positive outcomes for

children. One of the major initiatives in the ROA plan is the assessment of CQI and QA resources within the State. While it will take time to fully realize the benefits of the Program, successful implementation will fundamentally change the way the system works. Past reforms, such as the state's Title IV-E waiver offer funding flexibility that complements the Program and afford the opportunity to test innovative new programs and services.

Overall, the Department's changes to the QA/QI system have allowed the Department to utilize dedicated QA FTEs to utilize Rapid Safety Feedback process to review open cases of the highest risk population: children under 4 years of age with a family history of substance abuse and domestic violence. Rapid Safety Feedback allows the Department and CBCs to take a proactive approach to actions resulting from case reviews during open investigations and ongoing cases for the most vulnerable children in our systems and is expected to help better achieve child and family outcomes. For children in out-of-home care, the Department will continue to assess service provision utilizing our resources assigned to the CBCs.

Employment

1. Develop a performance metrics for the IL population related to employment, to include pre-employment readiness services, employment, and employment retention services.
2. Provide or increase the professional development trainings, focused on employment, for providers who serve the IL population.
3. Increase IL population and/or service provider's engagement with the workforce development boards to heighten awareness of the unique employment needs related to the IL population.

DCF Response

The Department recognizes the importance of developing an adequate array of life skills within youth in foster care, including the skills necessary for employment, and included this topic during the 2015 Independent Living conference. The Department supports employment efforts as described in the Council's report and has included a requirement for Community Based Care (CBC) Lead Agencies to work in partnership with local DCF offices in the development of working agreements with local workforce initiatives in the CBC contract. The Department currently shares data on young adults 18+ served with the Department of Economic Opportunity in order to obtain employment information and will explore the ability to do the same for teenagers in licensed care. In addition, the Department has chaired a workgroup focused on quality care standards for group care.

Legislative Recommendations

Please reference the Independent Living Advisory Council's legislative recommendations in their 2015 Report of Independent Living Services for Florida's Foster Youth.

DCF Response

The Department would not be opposed to any of the suggested revisions.