

Legislative Report Does Not Require Regionalization of DSS Offices

In 2017, the General Assembly passed [Session Law 2017-41](#), legislation to address ways to strengthen and restructure the social service and child welfare system in North Carolina, to that end, the Social Services Regional Supervision and Collaboration Working Group (SSWG) was created to make recommendations for NC DHHS and the General Assembly on delivering optimal services and inter-county collaboration. On February 20, 2019, the second and final stage of recommendations was released. This report focused on information sharing, conflicts of interest, inter-county movement, and regional administration for inter-county collaboration. The first stage report of the SSWG made recommendations regarding regional state offices, allocation of social services administration duties, and information sharing.

Recommendations of the SSWG Stage 2 Report

Regional Administration

Re-affirming the legislation, the SSWG recommends that the multi-county departments for social services programs should not be required because of the adequacy of enhanced regional supervision from NC DHHS. However, counties may volunteer to join together and create multi-county departments to improve overall communication and collaboration.

Conflicts of Interest (COIs)

The legislature should amend Session Law 2017-41 to clarify situations involving conflicts of interest. Recommended amendments include:

- Defining conflict of interest
- Requiring COIs to be resolved quickly
- Notifying DHHS of any COIs
- Giving DHHS COI assignment authority
- Granting the Social Service Commission authority to settle COIs and report to Joint Legislative Oversight Committee on Health and Human Services on outcomes

Defining a conflict of interest is especially pertinent. For example, is it a conflict of interest if a report is submitted to Child Protective Services that involves a family member of an employee in a different county department. The NC DHHS should develop a database of information that cites all COI cases and results. This will give a clear view of how the policies should be interpreted and how COIs should be handled. Ultimately, after these amendments are made, comprehensive training in COI policy is needed.

Inter-County Movement of Clients

Clear processes for transferring adult guardianship cases between counties should be established for seamless transfers and information sharing across counties. In addition, the SSWG recommends clerks of court provide at least 10 working days notice to a local social services director before any hearing where the director is appointed an adult guardian. Technology use such as telephone or video conferencing between NC DHHS and parents, incarcerated people, or people physically unable to travel is encouraged if used appropriately. The SSWG advises

studying the social services residency process, funding for guardians and eligibility determinations.

Information Sharing

A new information technology platform is being developed to share legal action information on people that have been involved with social services in any county of the state. This will provide attorneys and directors limited information about these persons. The SSWG recommends the legislature require a study on all state social services confidentiality laws to make a consistent and efficient information sharing platform across the state. The NC DHHS will train the counties in this new platform.

Other recommendations:

Stating that successful social services programs need a reliable information system, SSWG recommends the legislature and NC DHHS reexamine the usefulness of NC FAST plan. NC DHHS should clarify policies related to inter-county assistance including financial assistance. Once these measures have been in place for two years, the legislature will evaluate their effectiveness. The SSWG suggests the regional State offices should be responsible for monitoring the caseloads of all staff. No more than two years after the legislation is active, these systems will be evaluated. NC DHHS needs to create workforce development programs and curate stories of positive inter-county collaborations online and at annual conferences to encourage learning from these examples. Lastly, NC DHHS should create an advisory board to conduct all the recommended research on the success of these new programs.

The work of the SSWG concludes by February 1, 2020 and with the conclusion of their work comes a period of evaluation.

Five Key Portions of the Reform Legislation: S.L. 2017-41

The SSWG recommendations were created as one of the five key portions of the North Carolina Session Law 2017-41. These include:

- 1. The Reform Plan** - The reform reviewed all North Carolina social services programs to ensure maximum accountability and efficiency in social services funds.
- 2. Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs)** – Starting in July of 2018, the MOUs measure program performance by requiring local social service agencies outside of Medicaid and NC Health Choice to enter into written agreements each year with the state.
- 3. [Children’s Council](#)** – Created on December 19, 2018, this committee provides a forum for high-level oversight in all public services for children.
- 4. Regional Departments** – Beginning in March of 2019, counties are encouraged to join together in regional social services departments to create a unified approach in services and financial responsibility across counties.
- 5. [Social Services Regional Supervision and Collaboration Working Group](#) (SSWG)** – The SSWG recommendations ensure consistency in all counties, create accountability and track performance of county social services programs.