

Foster Care Review Office Annual Report on the Status of Nebraska's Children and Youth in Foster Care

Respectfully submitted as required under Neb. Rev. Stat. §43-1303(4)

Executive Summary

In fiscal year 2018-19 (July 1, 2018-June 30, 2019), the FCRO tracked information regarding the experiences of **7,321 children who were removed from their home** and put in to state custody or care through the child welfare or juvenile probation systems.

Tracking is facilitated by the FCRO's independent data system, through collaboration with our partners at NDHHS and the Administrative Office of Probation. Every episode in care, placement change, and worker change is tracked; relevant court information for each child is gathered and monitored; and data relevant to the children reviewed is gathered and entered into the data system by FCRO staff. This allows us to analyze large scale system changes and select children for citizen review based on their time in care and the date of those children's upcoming court hearings.

Once a child is selected for review, FCRO System Oversight Specialists track children's outcomes and facilitate citizen reviews. Local board members, who are community volunteers that have successfully completed required instruction, conduct case file reviews and make required findings. In fiscal year 2018-19, local board members:

- Conducted **4,223 reviews of cases involving 3,277 NDHHS wards**¹ in out-of-home care² or trial home visit placement,³ and
- Conducted **280 reviews of 276 youth in out-of-home care supervised by the Office of Probation Administration** that had no simultaneous child welfare system involvement.
- Conducted **14 reviews of 14 youth placed at the YRTC** that had no simultaneous child welfare system involvement.

The oversight role of the FCRO is two-fold. During each case file review, the needs of each specific child are reviewed, and if the system is not meeting those needs, the FCRO will

¹ Children are typically reviewed once every six months for as long as they remain in out-of-home care or trial home visit; therefore, some children will have two reviews during a 12-month period.

² Out-of-home care is 24-hour substitute care for children placed away from their parents or guardians and for whom the State agency has placement and care responsibility. This includes but is not limited to foster family homes, foster homes of relatives, group homes, emergency shelters, residential treatment facilities, child-care institutions, pre-adoptive homes, detention facilities, youth rehabilitation facilities, and runaways from any of those facility types. These are court ordered placements.

³ Neb. Rev. Stat. §43-1301(11) defines a trial home visit as "Trial home visit means a placement of a court-involved juvenile who goes from a foster care placement back to his or her legal parent or parents or guardian but remains as a ward of the state." This applies only to NDHHS wards, not to youth who are only under Probation supervision.

advocate for the best interest of the individual child. Simultaneously, the data collected from every case file review is used to provide a system-wide view of changes, successes, and challenges of the complicated worlds of child welfare and juvenile justice.

Our role is to push those systems to best meet the needs of all children, and to ensure that children are better off when they leave out-of-home care than when they entered. The recommendations in this report are based on the careful analysis of the FCRO data that follows.

From the required yearly analysis and over 4,000 reviews of children's cases, **the FCRO finds that many problems in child welfare and juvenile justice remain to be addressed and some new issues have arisen.** In summary,

- Nebraska families continue to struggle with substance use, domestic violence, and access to mental health treatment.
- Child welfare has not yet made significant improvements to several persistent issues. This includes, but is not limited to, too many caseworker changes, children with multiple removals from their homes, adjudication delays, courts inconsistently holding required exception hearings, courts often not making required federal SFA findings, and older children infrequently attending court hearings that will impact their future.
- Juvenile Probation continues to have challenges across the state providing community-based services needed to prevent removals from the home, and creating transition plans for youth returning to their communities.
- For the second year in a row there was a decrease in the number of state wards, mainly due to more families being served via in-home, non-court services. However, it is unclear if those families are faring better because the FCRO does not have authority to provide oversight to the front-end of the child welfare system, there is no court involvement, and there is no other independent oversight to that part of the system.
- FCRO strongly encourages stakeholders to act upon the FCRO's recommendations from fiscal year 2017-18, most of which were not addressed this past year. Until needed improvements are made it is unlikely that Nebraska will see significant positive changes in outcome measures for children in its custody or care.

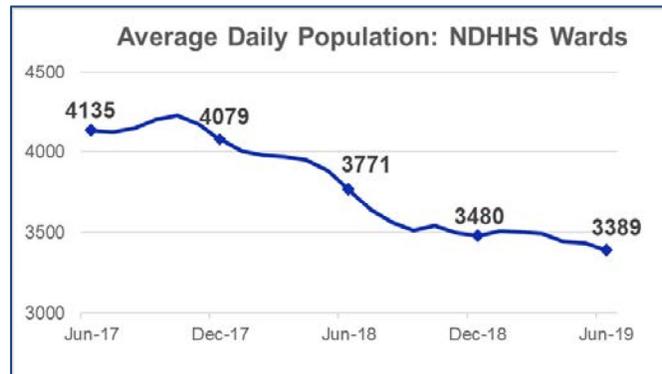
The FCRO will continue to tenaciously make recommendations, and to repeat unaddressed recommendations as applicable, until Nebraska's child welfare and juvenile justice systems have a stable, well-supported workforce that is strongly encouraged to utilize best practices and has access to a broad range of proven, effective services in all areas of the state.

We look forward to the opportunity to work with our system partners to improve the lives of Nebraska's most vulnerable citizens.

Child Welfare

Decrease in state wards in out-of-home or trial home visit placement

The most significant finding about the child welfare population is the decline in the number of children out-of-home. From June of 2018 to June of 2019, there has been an **10.1% decrease in the number of NDHHS state wards in care** (page 2), following an 8.8% decrease in the previous fiscal year. While all areas of the state have seen a decrease in the number of children in care, the decline is most substantial for the Northern (-**20.3%**) and Southeast (-**16.0%**) service areas.



This population decrease is explained by fewer children entering foster care, beginning in the fall of 2017. NDHHS CQI data indicates that during the same time period, a lower percentage of CPS intakes were accepted for assessment and a higher number of families were served through in-home, non-court services.⁴ The FCRO does not, however, provide oversight to the front-end of the child welfare system, and therefore cannot fully assess how and if these changes better serve children and families.

The changes in how children and families are served by the child welfare system shifted the landscape of child welfare, and many Nebraska stakeholders, the FCRO included, expressed frustration over the initial lack of collaboration and transparency. The FCRO firmly believes that children and families are best served in their homes when it is safe to do so, and that only children whose safety cannot be assured should be placed in temporary foster care. The FCRO also believes that systematic external oversight is essential to ensuring safety for Nebraska's most vulnerable children.

The federal Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) will once again change the landscape of child welfare in Nebraska and the nation as a whole. These changes will begin to impact practice in FY2019-20. NDHHS has been keeping stakeholders advised as they have learned of finalization of federal regulations of the different components of the FFPSA.⁵

Children and their experiences in care

- Children continue to be placed in family-like settings at high rates (**96.9%**), which are the least restrictive settings (page 14). As has been the trend for the past few years, over half (**53.0%**) of all children placed in a family like setting are placed with relatives or kin.

⁴ Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services. "Nebraska Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI): Child Protection & Safety." June 2019. Available at: <http://dhhs.ne.gov/CFS%20CQI%20Quarterly%20Metrics/June%202019%20Continuous%20Quality%20Improvement%20Metrics.pdf>

⁵ <http://dhhs.ne.gov/Pages/Family-First.aspx>

- While the FCRO is encouraged that children are often placed with persons known to them, thus reducing the trauma of removal, we recommend licensing for relative and kin placements. This will provide a standardized training for these caregivers, increase knowledge of available supports, reduce placement changes, and increase the amount of Federal Title IV-E funds accessed by the State.
- Caseworker changes remain all too frequent for children in foster care, with **18.5% of children out-of-home or in trial home visit having 5 or more caseworkers this episode** (*page 18*).
 - The Eastern Service Area, which during this fiscal year was served by the private contractor PromiseShip, has the second highest proportion of children with 5 or more caseworkers (**20.2%**).
 - In early July 2019, NDHHS announced that St. Francis Ministries will assume the ESA contract for case management beginning December 2019. The contract change should have no effect on the data presented here, as this data is from before the announced change, and is similar to data on the ESA caseworker changes for the past several years.
 - The Northern Service Area, which historically had the most stable caseworker population, now has the highest proportion of children with 5 or more caseworkers (**21.2%**) for the second year in a row.
 - The Northern Service Area also had a lower rate of caseworker contact with children every 60 days (**91.2%** compared to a state average of **98.3%**).
- Far too many children have multiple episodes in foster care (**23.6%**), including **10.8% of children 5 or younger** (*page 19*).
- Almost half (**44.8%**) of children reviewed had a mental health diagnosis at the time of review (*page 46-47*). Additionally, many children reviewed in out-of-home care had one or more chronic cognitive or physical health impairments.
- Of all children reviewed, **5.4%** qualified for developmental disability services (*page 49*). **Almost 2/3 (61.4%) of the children who qualified for disability services were not receiving those services through the NDHHS Division of Disability Services.**
- Both school performance and negative behaviors at school vary by gender (*page 51*). For children reviewed, **13.7% of girls and 21.2% of boys were not on target to graduate.** Boys were more likely than girls to have occasional and consistent behavior problems at school.

Parents of Children in Care

- The most common reason children were removed from their homes was parental neglect (**66.7%**). Neglect is often a symptom of an underlying condition, most commonly drug use, violence in the home, and parental mental health condition. These underlying conditions must be addressed before children can safely return home.

- **About one-fourth** of children's parents court-ordered to have visitation were not consistently visiting their children (*page 30*).

The Child Welfare System

- The FCRO was unable to determine if **5.9%** of children reviewed were safe in their current placement (*page 25*). This was frequently due to a lack of critical documentation about the placement, often due to a lack of a completed home study.
- Nearly **17%** of children reviewed changed placements within the prior six months (*page 26*). Most concerning, **27.7% of placement moves were due to provider request**, up from 24.4% in the prior fiscal year. Additionally, **5.4% of placement changes were due to allegations of abuse/neglect in the foster home**.
- Children in a trial home visit at the time of review were less likely than children placed out-of-home to have safety measures in their case plan (**89.6% and 94.4%, respectively**). Given that children in a trial home visit are returning to a setting that was at one point deemed unsafe and that trial home visits are less likely to be monitored by outside contractors for safety, it is especially critical that safety measures are well-thought out and documented for this population (*page 32*).
- **For over half of the children in out-of-home care reviewed, cases were stagnating and permanency is still far away** (*pages 34-35*). For **27.4%** of children out-of-home, there was no progress toward the primary permanency goal, and for an additional **25.2%** progress was minimal. Furthermore, **5.7% of 14 to 18 year olds with a permanency objective of reunification did not want to return home** (*page 34*).
- ICWA cultural plans had been developed for only **56.0%** of ICWA qualified children reviewed during the fiscal year (*page 40*).
- In FY 2018-19, **143 youth left the child welfare system on the day they reached legal adulthood having never reached permanency** (*page 5 and page 52*). Improvement is needed in preparing older children for adult lives, given that **29.8%** of those required to have a completed independent living assessment did not, **only 45.8%** of older youth identified their required transition team, and a significant number of older children were either not obtaining skills for adulthood (**16.0%**) or the FCRO could not determine if they were (**23.6%**).
- Approximately **1 in 4** children reviewed had a court-ordered concurrent permanency objective. And, in over **50%** of cases in which there was a concurrent objective, either partial or no progress was being made (*pages 35-36*).

Courts

- For approximately **1 in 3 children (30.7%)** reviewed, adjudication occurred more than 3 months after removal (*page 38*).
- Exception hearings should be held for all children in care 15 of the past 22 months, but for **28.2% of those children reviewed the exception hearing had not occurred**

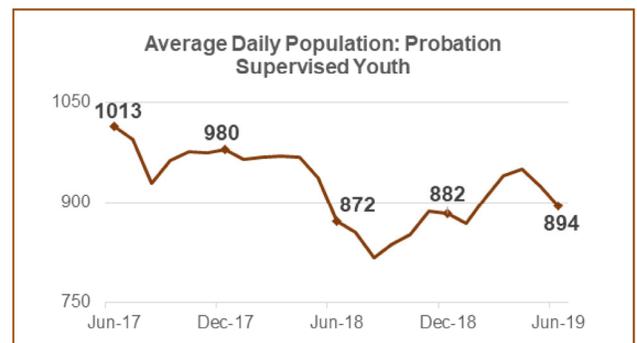
(page 39). The FCRO was unable to determine if the exception hearing had occurred for an additional **17.1%** of children.

- The FCRO is adamant that children’s voices need to be heard throughout the entirety of a case, especially older children. **Yet, during FY 2018-19 just 14.6% of children aged 10-18 attended court hearings** (page 40). Furthermore, the court is to inquire if children 14-18 were involved in developing the case plan, however the FCRO could confirm this occurred in **only 42.7% of cases**, which was a significant increase from the 14.6% the previous year.
- Only **1/3 of court orders contained the required Strengthening Families Act (SFA) findings** (pages 40-41).

Youth in Out-of-Home Care Supervised by the Office of Probation Administration

Increase in the population of Probation supervised youth in out-of-home care

From June 2017 to June 2018, the population of Probation supervised youth in out-of-home care has increased by **2.5%** (page 6). This slight increase in the population occurred after a significant decrease (**-14.4%**) in the previous fiscal year. Last year’s population decrease was driven by large decreases in the use of out-of-home care in Lancaster and Douglas counties. During FY2018-19, Lancaster county’s out-of-home population was stable throughout the year and Douglas county’s out-of-home population increased (page 7). The peak average daily population of youth in out-of-home care occurred in April 2019 (**950**), and steadily decreased in the last two months of the fiscal year.



- Districts 1, 6, 7, and 10 have seen decreases in the number of youth in out-of-home care throughout FY2018-19.
- In addition to District 4J (Douglas county), Districts 2, 5, 8, 9, 11, and 12 have seen increases in the number of youth in out-of-home care throughout FY2018-19.

Probation Supervised Youth in Out-of-Home Care

- Racial disproportionality in the juvenile justice population continues to be a concern (pages 56-57). Youth who are Non-Hispanic Black or African American make up 5.6% of Nebraska’s population, but **24.2%** of the Probation supervised youth in out-of-home care. Non-Hispanic American Indian youth are 1.1% of Nebraska’s youth population, but **5.6%** of the out-of-home population.
- The majority (**59.8%**) of Probation supervised youth in out-of-home care are in a non-treatment congregate (group) care facility (page 57). Considering **89.8%** of reviewed

Probation supervised youth have a professionally identified mental health condition (*page 67*) and **45.1%** have a substance use issue (*pages 67-68*), treatment-centered facilities are vital to meeting the needs of the population.

- While it is not surprising that the most common barrier for returning home is a youth needing time to complete services or treatment (**65.6%**), it is concerning that for **18.7%** of youth reviewed, their parents' inability to manage the youth's behaviors was a barrier to returning home (*page 66*). For **7.3% of the youth** their parents were unwilling to take them home. These issues are beyond the control of the individual youth, and it is important that the juvenile justice system identify concrete action steps when parents' issues prevent youth from returning home.
- **Roughly one-third (36.8%) of the Probation supervised youth reviewed had a previous out-of-home care episode with NDHHS-CFS** (*page 67*).

The Juvenile Probation System

- A significant number of Probation supervised youth out-of-home (**53.4%**) did not receive community-based services prior to initial placement out-of-home (*page 60*).
- Youth in the 4J and 3J Probation Districts (Douglas and Lancaster counties, respectively) were much more likely to have a written transition plan available for review than all other Probation Districts; **91.8% compared to 60.8%** (*page 62*).
- **For 29.3% of probation youth reviewed, their risk to re-offend as measured by the evidence-based YLS tool, increased while out-of-home.** For an additional **46.8%**, there was no change in YLS score from adjudication to FCRO review (*page 64-65*).
- Local boards were consistently unable to determine important findings because of a lack of appropriate documentation and FCRO staff made corrections to the placement history of **22.5%** of the reviewed youth (*page 61*). Improved documentation is not only beneficial to the FCRO, but improves internal consistency and reduction of duplicative work if probation officer changes are necessary.

Courts

- **12 probation youth reviewed by the FCRO were placed in out-of-home care and had no legal representation** (*page 70*).

ACTION ON LAST YEAR'S RECOMMENDATIONS

The FCRO carefully analyzes and makes recommendations each year as required by statute based on factors described through each annual report. Recommendations described yearly are important changes that must occur in order to effectuate positive outcomes for children and their families.

The chart in this section describes the progress or lack thereof on many of the FCRO's major recommendations from last year. As a result many of these recommendations will be re-issued this year.

FY2017-18 Recommendation	Status as of 6/2019
<p>Conduct a legislative study examining changes needed to the juvenile court jurisdiction statute found at Neb. Rev. Stat. §43-247 and ways to improve the prosecutorial model used in Nebraska to effectively address the needs of children and families. This study must include the following: a) the scope of the legal ability of the court in delinquency actions to require parents to participate in services; b) the legal definitions regarding a no-fault abuse/neglect filing and a status offender filing; c) the legal definitions regarding a juvenile mental health commitment filing; and d) ways to achieve consistency in the filing of juvenile court actions.</p>	<p>No progress. The FCRO continues to advocate for this recommendation.</p>
<p>Conduct a legislative study to assist in developing an external oversight system for non-court child welfare families, which would include compliance with NDHHS-CFS policy and Nebraska statutes and the need and availability of services statewide to ensure children remain safe and their best interests remain at the forefront.</p>	<p>Progress. LR105 and LR160 are set for hearing this fall before the HHS Committee. Based upon the results of the hearing, discussions are set to occur to determine any needed next steps.</p>

FY2017-18 Recommendation	Status as of 6/2019
<p>Enact legislation requiring that all children/youth involved in the child welfare and juvenile justice system must attend every court hearing after adjudication unless the court waives their presence after a court hearing. By keeping the child/youth at the forefront, this requires all parties to be trauma-informed and sensitive to their needs.</p>	<p>No progress. The FCRO continues to advocate for this recommendation.</p>
<p>Enact legislation requiring that all relative and kinship placements must obtain a child-specific foster care license within 120 days of placement. This legislation must include the requirement that NDHHS, through its regulations, create the process for obtaining a child-specific foster care license.</p>	<p>No progress. The FCRO continues to advocate for this recommendation.</p>
<p>Enact legislation ensuring that all youth involved in the juvenile justice system have access to court-appointed legal counsel unless waived by the youth.</p>	<p>Some Progress. LB231 remains before the Unicameral. The FCRO strongly supports enactment of this legislation.</p>
<p>Enact legislation amending the Nebraska statutes regarding the legal basis for the termination of parental rights and the process for the filing of these legal actions.</p>	<p>Progress. LB388 remains before the Unicameral. The FCRO strongly supports enactment of this legislation.</p>
<p>Require that all guardians ad litem must receive a copy of the home study prior to placement of a child in a home or within 60 days if the placement is the first placement of a child.</p>	<p>No progress. The FCRO continues to advocate for this recommendation.</p>
<p>Ensure compliance with the Supreme Courts' Progression Standards for juvenile court.</p>	<p>Significant progress. The Nebraska Supreme Court has consistently moved forward in creating and implementing these standards for all judges. The FCRO commends the Supreme Court on their progress.</p>

FY2017-18 Recommendation	Status as of 6/2019
Explore the feasibility and impact of court review hearings held every three months instead of every six months to increase accountability across the system.	No progress. The FCRO continues to advocate for this recommendation.
Ensure that the child/youth's voice is integrated into all legal proceedings including appearance at court hearings and involvement in all aspects of case planning.	No progress. The FCRO continues to advocate for this recommendation.
Establish clear and concise policy and procedures with regard to effective safety planning to include clear expectations for the families and mechanisms to ensure compliance with the safety plan. This is true whether the safety plan involves a court-involved case or non-court case or out-of-home placement.	Some progress. There continues to be the need for clear and concise policies and procedures with regard to safety planning. NDHHS is implementing safety organized practice that should assist with proactive steps forward.
Determine the feasibility of replicating the Robert F Kennedy National Resource Center for Juvenile Justice System's Assessment in District 4J (Douglas County)	Some progress. Discussions have just begun on this recommendation.
Creation of concrete action steps when parents' issues prevent a youth from returning home in collaboration with all juvenile justice stakeholders	Some progress. NDHHS and the Office of Probation have begun work on this issue but currently no formal action steps have been developed.
Complete a collaborative study on how children move from the child welfare system to the juvenile justice system to the adult correctional system	No progress. The FCRO continues to advocate for this recommendation.

FY2017-18 Recommendation	Status as of 6/2019
<p>Establish an effective, evidence-supported, goal driven, out-come based service array throughout the State to meet the needs of children and families involved in the child welfare system to include the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Preventative services for neglect and substance use in collaboration with NDHHS Behavioral Health; b. Out-of-home services such a family support and parenting time services that have the least traumatic impact on children. c. Stabilization of placements and recruitment of foster parents based upon the needs of the child/youth in collaboration with foster care providers; d. Creation of treatment foster care services which actively engage families and would meet the needs of older youth; e. In-home supports for foster parents especially relative/kin placements; f. Mental and behavioral services for children/youth in collaborations with NDHHS Behavioral Health; g. Developmental disability services for children/youth in collaboration with NDHHS Developmental Disabilities; and h. Enhanced services and case management for older youth. 	<p>Some progress.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With the passage of the Federal Families First Prevention Act, NDHHS has been working on the creation and implementation of evidence-supported prevention and in-home services. • The Nebraska Supreme Court Commission on Children in the Courts has been working on ensuring these services are available state-wide, especially in the rural areas. • The Nebraska Children’s Commission workgroup has been working on treatment foster care, but there remains impediments to implementation within NDHHS Medicaid. • The NDHHS System of Care workgroups have been working on the creation and implementation of mental health crisis stabilization services state-wide. • The Nebraska Coalition for Juvenile Justice and the Juvenile Services Committee of the Nebraska Children’s Commission have been working on educational resources regarding juvenile suicides and continue to work on information of needed processes and services for those youth. • There has been no progress or decision regarding the need for developmental disability services for child welfare children.

FY2017-18 Recommendation	Status as of 6/2019
<p>Establish an effective, evidence-supported, goal driven, out-come based service array throughout the State to meet the needs of youth involved in the juvenile justice system to include the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Community based services prior to being placed out-of-home. b. Recruitment and retention of foster homes to meet the needs of probation youth. c. Creation of services for parents to assist in managing the behaviors of their youth. 	<p>Some progress. The Supreme Court Commission on Children in the Courts has created a workgroup that has diligently been working on increasing the needed services in the rural areas.</p>
<p>Complete a collaborative study regarding creation of a systemic response when a child or family is in crisis. This must be based on the needs of the child and not just on the fastest or easiest way to access services. Too often, the child welfare system is the quickest way to access services but not always the most appropriate and even sometimes can do the most harm to the child. This study should include ways to break down silos within NDHHS to ensure that the most appropriate NDHHS division is meeting the short-term and long-term needs of the child and family. This study must also include an evaluation of the various State and federal funding sources for each of these divisions and re-appropriation of funds between NDHHS divisions as needed.</p>	<p>No progress. The FCRO continues to advocate for this recommendation. The Nebraska Children's Commission, with its multi-disciplinary makeup, could spearhead this effort.</p>

CURRENT (FY2018-19) RECOMMENDATIONS

As an independent oversight entity, the FCRO is able to make recommendations that reflect a comprehensive, statewide perspective based on the following:

- Annual completion of over 4,000 individual case file reviews on children in out-of-home care by multi-disciplinary local boards located statewide and staffed by FCRO System Oversight Specialists,
- The FCRO's research, collection, and analysis of critical data on children in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems.

The FCRO takes the responsibility to make our statutorily mandated recommendations on systemic improvements seriously. Recommendations, like all other work of the FCRO, are made with a focus on meeting children's best interests. Many of our recommendations have not changed since the publication of the FCRO's 2018 Annual Report because the issues have yet to be adequately addressed.

Legislative:

1. Conduct a legislative study examining changes needed to the juvenile court jurisdiction statute found at Neb. Rev. Stat. §43-247 and ways to improve the prosecutorial model used in Nebraska to effectively address the needs of children and families. This study must include the following: a) the scope of the legal ability of the court in delinquency actions to require parents to participate in services; b) the legal definitions regarding a no-fault abuse/neglect filing and a status offender filing; c) the legal definitions regarding a juvenile mental health commitment filing; and d) ways to achieve consistency in the filing of juvenile court actions. (Reissued from 2018 Annual Report)
2. Conduct a legislative study to assist in developing an external oversight system for non-court child welfare families, which would include compliance with NDHHS-CFS policy and Nebraska statutes and the need and availability of services statewide to ensure children remain safe and their best interests remain at the forefront. (Reissued from 2018 Annual Report)
3. Enact legislation requiring that all children/youth involved in the child welfare and juvenile justice system must attend every court hearing after adjudication unless the court waives their presence after a court hearing. By keeping the child/youth at the forefront, this requires all parties to be trauma-informed and sensitive to their needs. (Reissued from 2018 Annual Report)
4. Enact legislation requiring that all relative and kinship placements must obtain a child-specific foster care license within 120 days of placement. This legislation must include the requirement that NDHHS, through its regulations, create the process for obtaining a child-specific foster care license. (Reissued from 2018 Annual Report)

5. Enact legislation ensuring that all youth involved in the juvenile justice system have access to court-appointed legal counsel unless waived by the youth. (Reissued from 2018 Annual Report)
6. Enact legislation amending the Nebraska statutes regarding the legal basis for the termination of parental rights and the process for the filing of these legal actions. (Reissued from 2018 Annual Report)

NDHHS:

1. Establish an effective, evidence-supported, goal driven, out-come based service array throughout the State to meet the needs of children and families involved in the child welfare system to include the following:
 - a. Preventative services for neglect and substance use in collaboration with NDHHS Behavioral Health;
 - b. Out-of-home services such a family support and parenting time services that have the least traumatic impact on children.
 - c. Stabilization of placements and recruitment of foster parents based upon the needs of the child/youth in collaboration with foster care providers;
 - d. Creation of treatment foster care services which actively engage families and would meet the needs of older youth;
 - e. In-home supports for foster parents especially relative/kin placements;
 - f. Mental and behavioral services for children/youth in collaborations with NDHHS Behavioral Health;
 - g. Developmental disability services for children/youth in collaboration with NDHHS Developmental Disabilities; and
 - h. Enhanced services and case management for older youth.

(Reissued from 2018 Annual Report)
2. Establish clear and concise policy and procedures with regard to effective safety planning to include clear expectations for the families and mechanisms to ensure compliance with the safety plan. This is true whether the safety plan involves a court-involved case or non-court case or out-of-home placement. (Reissued from 2018 Annual Report)

Judicial System:

1. Require that all guardians ad litem must receive a copy of the home study prior to placement of a child in a home or within 60 days if the placement is the first placement of a child. (Reissued from 2018 Annual Report)
2. Ensure compliance with the Supreme Courts' Progression Standards for juvenile court. (Reissued from 2018 Annual Report)

3. Ensure that the child/youth's voice is integrated into all legal proceedings including appearance at court hearings and involvement in all aspects of case planning. (Reissued from 2018 Annual Report)

Juvenile Probation:

1. Create concrete action steps when parents' issues prevent a youth from returning home in collaboration with all juvenile justice stakeholders. (Reissued from 2018 Annual Report)
2. Consistently create and use individual transition plans as a guide for readying youth to return to his or her community.
3. Determine why for so many youth the YLS score of risk to re-offend remains constant or even increases after six months or more of Probation out-of-home care.

Multi-System Stakeholders:

1. Utilize the Nebraska Children's Commission to complete a collaborative study regarding creation of a systemic response when a child or family is in crisis. This must be based on the needs of the child and not just on the fastest or easiest way to access services. Too often, the child welfare system is the quickest way to access services but not always the most appropriate and even sometimes can do the most harm to the child. This study should include ways to break down silos within NDHHS to ensure that the most appropriate NDHHS division is meeting the short-term and long-term needs of the child and family. This study must also include an evaluation of the various State and federal funding sources for each of these divisions and re-appropriation of funds between NDHHS divisions as needed. (Reissued from 2018 Annual Report)

Every child in the child welfare system should be better off when leaving out-of-home care than when initially entering care. Past traumas should be healed. Relationships with safe and supportive adults should be built or enhanced, whether that is with the family of origin that has gained the necessary skills to cope with life's challenges, adoptive or guardianship families, or other adults committed to be there for the child now and in the future.

That can best happen if the entire child welfare system considers every policy and practice from a variety of perspectives, and if each component within the larger system has administration and staff that are united, equipped, and supported in achieving the best possible for the children.

Similarly, the FCRO encourages all involved with youth in juvenile justice who are placed out-of-home to consider policies and practices to safely reduce risk and improve youth's futures while maintaining more youth in the familial home.

Further information is available.

The FCRO has further data and information available on its website, www.fcro.nebraska.gov, or through the contact information on the last page of this Annual Report.