

Scope of Study

Connecticut Department of Children and Families

The Connecticut Department of Children and Families (DCF) has been studied, audited, reviewed and subject to legal action almost continuously since its inception in 1974. Concerns continue to be raised about the efficiency, effectiveness and advocacy capabilities of DCF. Options for restructuring DCF to address leadership, coordination, and program deficiencies were presented in a 1999 program review committee report on the agency; however, none were adopted by the legislature.

Other improvements, however, have been made at DCF, many in response to the ongoing 1991 *Juan F* Consent Decree. These include the establishment of internal monitoring and evaluation efforts that are carried out by the agency's Bureau of Continuous Quality Improvement. The department, for example, has embraced performance-based contracting in its brokering of direct services from private providers. Externally, multiple entities outside the agency, such as the Office of Child Advocate and the federal court monitor's office, also track DCF performance and provide oversight of program outcomes.

AREA OF FOCUS

An effective process for tracking accomplishments and assessing outcomes is the cornerstone of accountability and improved performance of state agencies. This study will provide a comprehensive assessment of current efforts, both internal and external, to monitor and evaluate the Department of Children and Families. It will identify strengths, gaps, and redundancies, as well as possible needed improvements to the existing DCF accountability system that would lead to better outcomes and agency performance overall. Specifically, the study will: 1) describe how goals set by and for the agency are measured and tracked; 2) evaluate the department's progress in attaining these goals; and 3) describe the extent to which the monitoring and evaluation results are used by DCF to improve the services it provides to children and families.

AREAS OF ANALYSIS

1) What is DCF trying to accomplish?

- Identify goals that describe what the agency is expected to accomplish overall, within each of its four mandate areas, (child protective services, children's behavioral health, juvenile justice, and prevention) and at the program level, as stated by:
 - Statute;
 - DCF policy;
 - Courts, legislative committees, federal government agencies, and accrediting bodies; and
 - Advisory boards, councils, commissions, advocates, and others involved in overseeing DCF that are in statute or executive order.
- Determine whether the goals for DCF are clearly defined, measurable, and consistent.

Scope of Study

2) How is progress tracked by DCF and others?

- Describe internal and external efforts to measure and report on identified goals, including resources expended.
- Review how well current measures match up with agency goals, identifying any gaps, deficiencies, or redundancies in the current monitoring and evaluation system.

3) What has DCF accomplished?

- Describe progress made in attaining stated agency goals.
- Summarize findings and recommendations from DCF-related investigations, studies and advisory bodies.

4) Did DCF use this feedback information about what it is trying to accomplish to improve performance?

- Evaluate the impact of monitoring and evaluation results on DCF policy and program decision making.
- Assess the impact of monitoring and evaluation results on DCF services received directly by children and families.
- Determine if monitoring and evaluation results are used to identify organizational and resource factors that hinder attainment of agency goals.

5) What changes could improve the system for tracking DCF outcomes and assessing accomplishments so that it results in better services for children and families?

- Identify any program areas lacking monitoring and evaluation to the detriment of the children and families served.
- Recommend possible ways to make the monitoring and evaluation of DCF more efficient and effective.

AREAS NOT UNDER REVIEW

The study will examine recommendations from monitoring and evaluation efforts regarding existing agency programs and exclude those pertaining to proposed programs. When monitoring and evaluation efforts cover multiple agencies, only recommendations relating to DCF will be examined in detail.