

Scope of Study

RBA PILOT PROJECT STUDY: SELECTED HUMAN SERVICES PROGRAMS (P.A. 09-166)

Public Act 09-166 requires the Legislative Program Review and Investigations Committee (PRI) to undertake a pilot project that assesses selected human services programs using Results-Based Accountability (RBA) principles. The public act defines RBA as a method for planning, budgeting, and measuring performance of state programs that focuses on the “quality of life results” Connecticut desires for its citizens. It identifies indicators of the state’s progress in achieving such outcomes, as well as performance measures for programs that contribute to those results. Under an RBA approach, program performance measures are captured by the questions: how much did we do; how well did we do it; and is anybody better off?

The public act calls for the program review committee to select the programs to be assessed through the pilot project after consultation with the Human Services Committee and Appropriations Subcommittee on Human Services. PRI must report information resulting from the program assessments, including any recommendations for modifications or terminations, to the Appropriations Committee by January 15, 2010. The report also must include an evaluation of the pilot project and any PRI recommendations regarding its continuation, expansion, or modification.

The General Assembly’s Appropriations Committee has been using an RBA approach within selected areas of the legislature’s budget process since 2005. That committee is working to incorporate RBA as a tool for determining whether the public is better off because of state expenditures made in selected areas and where future appropriations may have the most positive impact. One purpose of the RBA pilot project is to explore ways the performance and outcome evaluation work of PRI can be used to support and initiate further results-based decision-making by the Appropriations Committee.

SELECTED PROGRAMS: DCF FAMILY PRESERVATION AND SUPPORTS

After consulting with the co-chairs of the Human Services Committee and the Appropriations Subcommittee on Human Services, the program review committee selected Department of Children and Families (DCF) family preservation and supports as the topic for its RBA pilot project. This topic area consists of the department’s programs and services aimed at keeping children at risk of abuse and neglect safely with their families (thereby avoiding the need for out-of-home care), such as Parent Aides, Intensive Family Preservation, Flexible Funds, Supportive Housing for Families, and Intensive In-Home Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Services (IICAPS).

In FY 08, DCF received over 40,000 reports alleging child abuse and neglect and substantiated abuse or neglect in 27 percent of the more than 24,400 investigations it conducted. Substantiated cases usually require some level of agency intervention. On average, 3,400 Connecticut families were receiving some type of in-home child protection services from DCF in FY 08. During that fiscal year, the agency spent approximately \$28 million on community-based services for at-risk children and families. In comparison, state expenditures for foster care for children removed from their families (3,112 on average) totaled nearly \$111 million.

USING RBA PRINCIPLES

In assessing the selected human services programs, PRI must use the principles of results-based accountability. This first requires that the programs be examined within the broader context of the quality of life results to which they are intended to make a significant contribution. For the purposes of the pilot project, the relevant results statement is: “Connecticut children grow up safe, healthy, and ready to lead successful lives.” Next, indicators for tracking progress toward that outcome, as well as other major programs and partners contributing to those quality of life results, will be identified.

Data will be collected and analyzed to try to answer three core RBA questions, outlined below, for each DCF program included in the pilot project. Another key part of the RBA approach will be identifying related data weaknesses (e.g., unavailable, incomplete, poor quality) and developing a research agenda for addressing them.

- *How much did we do?* Describe program outputs, e.g.:
 - Number and types of families served
 - Amount and types of services provided
 - Resources allocated (by program/service, where possible)

- *How well did we do it?* Evaluate efficiency and quality of service delivery, e.g.:
 - Services appropriate and timely
 - Program standards met/best practices followed
 - Services research-based, regularly monitored
 - Client satisfaction
 - Cost-effectiveness

- *Is anyone better off?* Assess program outcomes (to the extent data are available), e.g.:
 - Children maintained safely with their families (out-of-home placement prevented, repeat in-home abuse/neglect avoided, families successfully reunified)
 - Child and family well-being improved (better family functioning, improved parenting skills, health, education, and basic living needs met, reduced violence/unsafe behaviors)

Lastly, in accordance with RBA principles, recommendations for improving program performance and achieving better progress toward desired results (“turn the curve”) will be developed. Particular attention will be given to no- and low-cost changes and opportunities for earlier intervention at lower cost. Possible streamlining of services and elimination of ineffective or duplicative programs also will be examined.

PILOT PROJECT EVALUATION

As required by P.A. 09-166, the pilot project itself will be evaluated to determine whether the process should be continued in the future and what, if any, changes in scope, timeframe, resources, or procedures might improve its effectiveness. Among other items, the evaluation will examine whether the RBA pilot project approach is a better alternative for systematic review of government programs with generally more significant budget impact than the programs and entities subject to Connecticut’s existing “sunset” (automatic program termination) law. (The act delays reactivation of the statutory sunset review process, which is carried out in part by PRI, for two years while the pilot project is implemented.)