

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
ADMINISTRATION FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

SIGNIFICANT ITEMS IN SENATE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE REPORT

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ADMINISTRATION FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Significant Items in Senate Appropriations Committee Report

FY 2011 Senate Appropriations Committee Report Language (S. Rpt. 111-243)

Item

Unaccompanied Alien Children — The Committee also notes that ORR is developing a request for a more general independent evaluation of the UAC program to determine if the program is operating consistent with child welfare best practices. The Committee encourages ORR to incorporate the findings from this evaluation in any future decisions regarding concentrating shelters closer to the border. (p. 150)

Action taken or to be taken

We appreciate the Committee's interest in the UAC program independent evaluation to determine if the program is operating consistent with child welfare best practices. We anticipate this contract to be awarded in July 2011 for approximately \$500K. We expect the results to be available in FY 2013 and ORR will incorporate the findings from this evaluation in any future decisions regarding concentrating shelters closer to the border.

Item

Head Start — The Committee strongly urges the Office of Head Start [OHS] to continue to work with grantees to ensure they are aware of their legal obligations to verify the eligibility of each child served in Head Start programs, including the serious consequences of falsifying eligibility determinations, and to increase monitoring of Head Start grantees, with a particular focus on unannounced visits. The Committee notes that in conducting its investigation, GAO contacted over 550 centers and found only 44 with current openings. This illustrates the demand for the comprehensive early childhood services Head Start programs provide, but also the need to ensure these funds are properly used. The Committee notes that the Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007 allows Head Start grantees to apply with HHS to transition from part-day to full-day services, and from Head Start to Early Head Start slots. Only a fraction of eligible infants and toddlers are currently served by the Early Head Start program, and the Committee encourages OHS to work with grantees to ensure they are aware of these options, particularly those with current openings. The Committee also notes that OHS is promulgating regulations to implement provisions of the Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007 concerning the re-competition of Head Start grants, the first time grantees will undergo re-competition, which will provide another check to ensure that grantees are properly and effectively managing their Head Start centers. (pp. 152-153)

Action taken or to be taken

The Office of Head Start has taken a number of steps to ensure grantees are aware of their legal obligations to verify the eligibility of each child served. OHS issued a Program Instruction, titled "Income Eligibility for Enrollment in Head Start and Early Head Start Programs," to grantees stating that employees who examine the documents and make an eligibility determination must sign a statement attesting to their review of the specific documents and the determination that the child is eligible based on family income. The PI encourages programs to maintain copies of the eligibility documents with the eligibility verification form in the child's official record, and expects programs to provide annual training to employees responsible for determining and verifying income eligibility to ensure that employees are fully aware of the consequences for those who knowingly sign a

verification form that has false information. To emphasize the importance of the PI, the Director of OHS held a Webcast with all Head Start grantees to reiterate the importance of establishing a culture of integrity in every Head Start program. Secretary Sebelius also sent a letter to every Head Start grantee underscoring the serious nature of allegations of fraud, making clear that the Department will not tolerate intentional violations of Head Start rules and regulations.

Consistent with our statutory authority, OHS has begun conducting unannounced on-site monitoring visits that take into account the specific issue of fraud and fiscal management. OHS is conducting unannounced visits in all of the programs where GAO identified problems as well as a subset of all on-going reviews. OHS also has undertaken a detailed review and analysis of the existing monitoring system to ensure that: 1) the verification of income eligibility is clearly understood and fully implemented; 2) Head Start grantees are providing regular training to employees who verify income; and 3) Head Start grantees have active waiting lists that, based on the Head Start grantees selection criteria as mandated in the 2007 Head Start Act, include income-eligible children as well as categorically eligible children, such as families receiving public assistance and homeless children and families; and 4) Head Start grantees are taking a closer look at their recruitment efforts and the need for the reallocation of slots.

Finally, in addition to ensuring grantees are aware of their legal obligations and providing oversight through monitoring, OHS has taken other steps to improve program integrity in general and the eligibility process specifically. OHS has partnered with the Office of Inspector General in working to strengthen regulations and to implement a web hotline for the purpose of reporting fraud and fiscal mismanagement. As noted by the Committee, OHS also has promulgated a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (NPRM) on the designation renewal system in the Federal Register on September 22, 2010. The public comment period ended on December 22, 2010 and OHS has begun work on the final rule taking into account public comments.

Item

Child Welfare Training — The Committee encourages the Administration for Children and Families to develop a federally supported, centralized Website that includes materials and information relevant to the needs of foster youth who are aging out of the system. This website should provide detailed information about relevant Federal and State programs, child welfare advocacy agencies, and nonprofit and community organizations dedicated to serving foster youth. (p. 155)

Action taken or to be taken

The Administration for Children and Families (ACF) does disseminate materials and information on youth transitioning out of foster care through the Child Welfare Information Gateway. The website collects information and materials from a variety of sources relating to youth transitioning or “aging out” of foster care, and provides information on best practices for meeting the needs of foster youth. The Child Welfare Information Gateway is supplemented by the National Resource Center for Youth Development (NRCYD) website. Through a cooperative agreement with ACF, NRCYD manages a website providing information about the programs and services available to youth who are transitioning out of the foster care system. This website features the following resources: information on federal and state programs and the agencies responsible for the implementation and provision of those services; contact information of each statewide Independent Living Services Program Manager, who helps interested parties determine their eligibility for available services; and, information on research and best practices relating to

the implementation of these services. The NRCYD is in the process of updating this website to better reflect the resources and youth advocacy groups at the local and state level. Both the Child Welfare Information Gateway and the website for the NRCYD provide all stakeholders with relevant, real-time information on independent living services and foster care transitions.

Item

Social Services Research — The Committee encourages ACF to work with the Administration on Aging and other HHS agencies to evaluate intergenerational approaches aimed at improving outcomes for vulnerable populations. The Committee is aware of effective neighborhood-based programs that utilize older volunteers to foster permanency and improved outcomes for at-risk youth. (p. 156)

Action taken or to be taken

As recommended by the Committee, ACF is working with the Administration on Aging and other HHS agencies to identify opportunities to evaluate intergenerational approaches to improving outcomes for vulnerable populations including at-risk youth. ACF has consulted with AoA and other agencies to begin identifying exemplary approaches.