



CHARLIE  
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GOVERNOR

STATE OF FLORIDA

# Office of the Governor

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December 31, 2007

To the People, Governor, Members of the Legislature, and Executive Department Heads of the State of Florida:

We are pleased to present the first Annual Report of the Office of Adoption and Child Protection. As directed by Subsection 39.001(7)(c)5 a-f, F.S., this report provides an update of the activities of the Office, as well as a summary of data pertaining to adoption rates and the issue of child abuse and neglect in our state. Also included are recommendations and budget requests by state agencies for the promotion of adoption, support of adoptive families and the prevention of child abuse and neglect.

We would like to thank the Department of Children and Families staffs for their cooperation and efforts in compiling the data contained in this report. Their willingness to serve the people of our great state shows in the diligence they took to collect and arrange this critical information. Clear and well-organized data enables us to move forward to better serve the people.

Also, the Governor's Office of Policy and Budget staffs were instrumental in the creation of this report. From the various affected state agencies, they were able to effectively glean in a timely manner the important information needed to help us determine their recommendations for Florida's future course of action as it relates to adoption and the prevention of child abuse and neglect.

Through their Legislature, the people of the State of Florida have determined that, "...the prevention of child abuse, abandonment and neglect shall be a priority of this state." From our observations and perspective, this priority of the people is of paramount concern. At the same time, the people have also directed us to ensure that the adoption of Florida's children is promoted and that the families who adopt these children are supported after the adoption.

With community-based care, Florida leads the nation in privatizing its foster care system for those children who are abused and neglected, and for this we can be thankful. But we need to remember that our ultimate goal, as resolved

by the people, is to keep Florida's children from ever entering into foster care in the first place by preventing child abuse and neglect. If we fail to accomplish this, then our primary focus is to make certain that a child's time in high quality foster care is as temporary as possible. Using a reasonable sense of urgency, Florida's foster children must be placed with permanent families, either through reunification with their biological families or by placing them into loving and nurturing adoptive families.

Our task is daunting but not impossible. With the support and direction of the people of Florida, great things can and will be accomplished. Recently, with regards to child welfare, Florida progressed from a state-based system of care to one that engaged our communities at the local level to embrace our children and ensure positive outcomes for their well-being. Our next noble venture, and no doubt our greatest challenge, will be to transition one final time into a more inherent, family-based framework of care where Florida's families are enabled and empowered to do what they could and should do for their own children. These children will then have the unobstructed opportunity to reach their goals, live their dreams and realize their unique purpose in life. This is a challenge we are motivated to achieve because Florida's families and their children deserve no less.

The staff of the Office of Adoption and Child Protection is to be commended for all their hard work not only to produce this report, but for their selfless efforts to help make Florida a better place for our families and children. Our gratitude goes out to Governor Charlie Crist for his dedication to and support of the vision that Florida is a place where families and their children can thrive. We also appreciate those citizens, Florida's taxpayers, who will take the time to review this report in order to more effectively participate in the decision-making process.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J. Kallinger". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent initial "J" and a trailing flourish.

Jim Kallinger  
Chief Child Advocate



## Annual Report 2007

### Table of Contents

#### **Part 1 – Office Activities**

Office of Adoption and Child Protection .....	1
Statewide Marketing Campaign for Adoption .....	1
Child Abuse Prevention and Permanency Advisory Council .....	2
Children and Youth Cabinet.....	5
Chief Child Advocate.....	7
Other .....	8

#### **Part 2 – Status of Adoptions and Child Maltreatment in Florida**

Summary of Adoption Data.....	9
Adoption Data Reported by the Department of Children and Families to the Federal Administration for Children and Families via the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) .....	9
Timeliness of the Adoption Process for Children Adopted from within the Child Welfare System .....	11
Summary of Child Maltreatment Data.....	14
Primary Outcomes for the <i>State Plan for the Prevention of Child Abuse,     Abandonment and Neglect: July 2005 through June 2010</i> .....	14
Status of Child Maltreatment in Florida.....	17

#### **Part 3 – Recommendations and Requests**

Agency Policy Recommendations .....	19
Agency for Persons with Disabilities (APD) .....	19
Agency for Workforce Innovation (AWI).....	20
Department of Children and Families (DCF).....	21
Department of Corrections (DOC) .....	23
Department of Education (DOE).....	23
Department of Health (DOH) .....	23
Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE).....	24
Agency Budget Requests.....	25
Department of Children and Families (DCF).....	25
Department of Health (DOH) .....	26
Department of Juvenile (DJJ) .....	26
Additional Informants in the Development of Recommendations .....	26
Aggregation of Circuit Representatives' Suggestions and Ideas .....	27
Aggregation of Child-Serving Agencies' Suggestions and Ideas .....	28
Discussion of Child Abuse Prevention and Permanency Advisory Council Deliberations.....	30

## **Part 1 – Office Activities**

### **Office of Adoption and Child Protection**

During the 2007 Legislative Session, HB 1309, sponsored by Representative Bill Galvano and Senator Rhonda Storms, was approved and sent to the Executive Branch for signature. On June 12, 2007, Governor Charlie Crist signed into law the bill creating the Office of Adoption and Child Protection, effective July 1, 2007. The duties and responsibilities of the Office are enshrined in Florida Statutes Chapter 39, entitled Proceedings Relating to Children. The Office was created, within the Executive Office of the Governor, for the purpose of establishing a comprehensive statewide approach for the promotion of adoption, support of adoptive families and prevention of child abuse, abandonment and neglect. The Office has a dedicated staff of four, including Jim Kallinger (Chief Child Advocate), Barbara Foster (Deputy Chief Child Advocate), Jennifer Stan (Project Coordinator) and Emily McAllister (Administrative Assistant).

### **Statewide Marketing Campaign for Adoption**

The 2007 Legislature appropriated \$1 million to the Office of Adoption and Child Protection for the purpose of initiating a statewide marketing campaign to promote the adoption of the children who are in Florida's foster care system.

Working with the Governor's Administration office, a Request for Proposal was drafted to recruit a marketing company to spearhead this campaign and the solicitation was issued on September 4, 2007. In response to the RFP, thirteen very qualified proposals were received from marketing firms around Florida and even a few from out of state. An Evaluation Team was assembled to score the proposals and, in the final tally, Ron Sachs Communications was awarded the contract.

In December, a needs assessment meeting was held with the Office and Ron Sachs Communications. During the month of January, focus groups will be convened to help develop a brand and logo for the campaign. In February 2008, the campaign to promote adoption statewide will commence and a new website for the Office will be launched as well.

Statutorily, the Office is authorized to establish a Direct Support Organization, namely a foundation, to help raise additional monies for the promotion of adoption, support of adoptive families and efforts to reduce child abuse and

neglect. Instead of exercising this option, the Office decided to develop a partnership with Volunteer Florida in order to seek out the private resources needed to help support the goals of the Office, all of which are in the best interest of the state.

In anticipation of a successful public awareness campaign that will draw many inquiries about adoption, the Office has instituted a customer service protocol with the organization that has the contract with the state for Florida's adoption hot-line phone number: 1-800-96ADOPT. As the volume of phone calls increase, customer service representatives need to be prepared to offer our citizens the service they deserve and expect. For this standard operating procedure to be successful, the community-based care lead agencies and local providers around the state are cooperating in its implementation. This protocol will also help to alleviate some of the inter-jurisdictional barriers that may exist between the different lead agencies. These innate obstacles in the community-based care system will be highlighted as public awareness grows and adoptions increase.

### **Child Abuse Prevention and Permanency Advisory Council**

The Office established a Child Abuse Prevention and Permanency Advisory Council comprised of thirty-two (32) outstanding members gathered from across Florida. In order to better serve the people of Florida, the membership exceeds the minimum requirements for representation as set forth in the Florida Statutes. The following table provides for the membership and the areas of representation on the Council.

<b>Area of Representation</b>	<b>Council Member</b>
<b>1. Chairman/ Convener</b> Executive Office of the Governor	<b>Jim Kallinger</b> , Chief Child Advocate and Director, Office of Adoption and Child Protection, Executive Office of the Governor
<b>2. DCF – Dept. of Children and Families</b>	<b>George Sheldon</b> , Assistant Secretary of Operations, Florida Department of Children and Families
<b>3. DOC – Dept. of Corrections</b>	<b>Tina Hayes</b> , Director of Department Initiatives, Florida Department of Corrections
<b>4. DOE – Dept. of Education</b>	<b>Iris C. Wilson</b> , K-12 Deputy Chancellor, Florida Department of Education
<b>5. DOH – Dept. of Health</b>	<b>Michael “Mike” Haney, Ph.D., NCC, LMHC</b> , Division Director for Prevention and Intervention, Children’s Medical Services, Florida Department of Health
<b>6. DJJ – Dept. of Juvenile Justice</b>	<b>Cassandra D. Jenkins</b> , Assistant Secretary for Prevention & Victim Services, Florida Department of Juvenile Justice
<b>7. DLE – Dept. of Law Enforcement</b>	<b>Terry Thomas</b> , Special Agent, Crimes Against Children Unit, Florida Department of Law Enforcement
<b>8. APD – Agency for Persons with Disabilities</b>	<b>Matthew Claps</b> , Senior Management Analyst II, Operations, Agency for Persons with Disabilities
<b>9. AWI – Agency for Workforce Innovation</b>	<b>Barbara Griffin</b> , Deputy Director, Agency for Workforce Innovation
<b>10. Parent with adopted child</b>	<b>Cyndee Odom</b> , Consultant
<b>11. Community mental health centers</b>	<b>Leonel “Leo” Mesa, Jr., Psy.D., LMHC</b> , President/CEO, Reflections Wellness Center
<b>12. Guardian ad litem programs</b>	<b>Angela Orkin</b> , Executive Director, Statewide Guardian ad Litem Office

<b>Area of Representation</b>	<b>Council Member</b>
13. School boards	<b>Georgia “Joy” Bowen</b> , VP, Florida School Boards Association
14. Local advocacy councils	<b>Ken Littlefield</b> , Executive Director, Statewide Advocacy Council
15. Community-based care lead agencies: West Coast	<b>Marcie Biddleman</b> , Executive Director, Heartland for Children, Inc.
16. Community-based care lead agencies: East Coast	<b>Patricia “Trish” Nellius-Guthrie</b> , CEO, Community Based Care of Brevard, Inc.
17. Private/ public programs with expertise in child abuse prevention programs	<b>Christie Ferris</b> , Director, PCA Florida, Ounce of Prevention Fund of Florida
18. Private/ public programs with expertise in working with children/ families of children who are sexually, physically or emotionally abused, abandoned or neglected	<b>Andrea Raasch, LCSW</b> , Licensed Clinical Director, Camelot Community Care, Inc.
19. Private/ public programs with expertise in maternal and infant health care	<b>George Hinchliffe</b> , Executive Director, Healthy Start Coalition of Jefferson, Madison and Taylor Counties, Inc
20. Multi-disciplinary child protection teams	<b>Mark Perlman, M.A.</b> , Founder and President, Center for Growth and Development
21. Child day care centers: Federal/State representation	<b>Lilli Copp</b> , Director, Head Start State Collaboration Office
22. Child day care centers: ECA representation	<b>Suzanne Gellens, M.S.</b> , Executive Director, Early Childhood Association of Florida
23. Law enforcement agencies	<b>Major Connie Shingledecker</b> , Investigative Bureau Chief, Manatee County Sheriff's Office
24. Circuit Courts	<b>Judge Daniel Dawson</b> , Circuit Judge, Ninth Judicial Circuit
25. Governor's Office of Adoption and Child Protection	<b>Barbara Foster, Ph.D.</b> , Deputy Chief Child Advocate and Director, Office of Adoption and Child Protection, Executive Office of the Governor
26. Child Advocacy/ Community Philanthropy	<b>Graciela “Graci” McGillicuddy</b> , Child Advocate and Community Philanthropist
27. Children's Advocacy Centers	<b>Julie Hurst</b> , Executive Director, Emerald Coast Children's Advocacy Center, Inc.
28. Community Alliances	<b>Marilyn “Bunny” Finney</b> , Brevard County Community Alliance
29. Local Children's Cabinet	<b>Nancy Crawford</b> , Executive Director, Kids House of Seminole, Inc. Children's Advocacy Center
30. Medical Doctor, University Researcher, Children's Services Council	<b>Peter A. Gorski, M.D., M.P.A.</b> , Director of Program Impact and Innovation, Children's Board of Hillsborough County Professor of Public Health, Pediatrics and Psychiatry, USF
31. State Court Administration	<b>Sandy Neidert</b> , Senior Court Operations Consultant, Office of the State Court Administrator, Office of Court Improvement, Florida State Courts
32. Florida Faith-Based and Community-Based Advisory Council	<b>Sheila Hopkins</b> , Associate Director for Social Concerns/ Respect Life, Florida Catholic Conference.

The inaugural meeting of the Council was held on Thursday, November 29, 2007 in Tallahassee and was filmed and aired by the Florida Channel. The Council members were charged with:

- Serving as a research arm for the Office.
- Assisting in developing a plan of action for better coordination and integration of the goals, activities and funding pertaining to the promotion and support of adoption and the prevention of child abuse, abandonment, and neglect in order to maximize staff and resources at the state level.
- Assisting in providing a basic format to be utilized by the districts in the preparation of local plans of action in order to provide for uniformity in the district plans and to provide for greater ease in compiling information for the state plan.

- Providing the districts with technical assistance in the development of local plans of action, if requested.
- Assisting in examining the local plans to determine if all the requirements of the local plans have been met and, if they have not, informing the districts of the deficiencies and requesting the additional information needed.
- Assisting in preparing the state plan for submission to the Legislature and the Governor in December 2008.

The meeting focused on developing a solid planning effort based upon the strengths of past planning efforts and on the current status of adoption, the current timeliness of the adoption process and the status of child maltreatment prevention in Florida. Two products that resulted from the meeting were the creation of a basic format to be used by the twenty (20) circuits in the preparation of their local plans of action, and a compilation of recommendations related to adoption and the prevention of child maltreatment.

The Florida Statutes also provide for workgroups of the advisory council to focus on cooperative planning efforts at the state level. Consequently, the Office established three workgroups.

1) The first group is comprised of representatives from the Office, the Department of Children and Families, the Department of Education, and the Department of Health with the charge of developing ways to inform and instruct parents of school children and appropriate district school personnel in all school districts in the detection of child abuse, abandonment and neglect, in the proper action that should be taken in a suspected case of child abuse, abandonment, or neglect, and in caring for a child's needs after a report is made. Also, the group must work to enhance or adapt curriculum materials to assist instructional personnel in providing instruction through a multidisciplinary approach on the identification, intervention, and prevention of child abuse, abandonment and neglect. They must also develop strategies for encouraging all school districts to utilize the curriculum.

2) The second group consists of members of the Office, the Department of Children and Families, the Department of Law Enforcement, and the Department of Health. They are charged with developing ways to inform and instruct appropriate local law enforcement personnel in the detection of child abuse, abandonment and neglect and in the proper action that should be taken in a suspected case of child abuse, abandonment or neglect.

3) The office shall work with other appropriate public and private agencies to emphasize efforts to educate the general public about the problem of and ways to detect child abuse, abandonment, and neglect and in the proper action that should be taken in a suspected case of child abuse, abandonment or neglect. The plan for accomplishing this end shall be included in the state plan.

The Office initiated efforts to convene local planning teams in each of the twenty (20) circuits around the state. These circuits are aligned with the judicial and planned Department of Children and Families circuits. The representation on these local planning teams is consistent with the make-up of the statewide advisory council. Office staff members met with the top administration of the circuits and the leadership of the community based care agencies in September 2007. By October 2007, each circuit had established a local planning team that was convened by the circuit administrator or a key leader in the circuit's administration. At a minimum, these teams were reviewed by the Office to ensure that the requirements of Chapter 39 for team membership were met. The local plans developed by the circuit teams will be incorporated into the five-year state plan on prevention and permanency.

## **Children and Youth Cabinet**

On July 11, 2007, Governor Charlie Crist signed House Bill 509, creating the Children and Youth Cabinet as a council within the Executive Office of the Governor. The legislation was sponsored by State Senator Nan Rich and State Representative Lorraine Ausley. The Cabinet is charged with promoting and implementing collaboration, creativity, increased efficiency, information sharing and improved service delivery between and within state agencies and organizations. On February 1, the Governor and the Florida Legislature will receive an annual report detailing the Cabinet's progress.

On August 28, 2007, Governor Crist announced his appointments to the Children and Youth Cabinet and designated Lt. Governor Jeff Kottkamp to serve as its chairman. As set forth in statute, the Children and Youth Cabinet consists of 20 members including:

**Bob Butterworth**, Secretary of the Department of Children and Families

**Walt McNeil**, Secretary of the Department of Juvenile Justice

**Andrew Agwunobi**, Secretary of the Agency for Health Care Administration

**Jane Johnson**, Director of the Agency for Persons with Disabilities

**Monesia Brown**, Director of the Agency for Workforce Innovation

**Ana Viamonte Ros**, State Surgeon General at the Department of Health

**Eric J. Smith**, Commissioner of the Department of Education

**Angela Orkin**, Statewide Director of the Guardian Ad Litem Office  
**Jim Kallinger**, Florida's Chief Child Advocate

The five ex-officio members of the Cabinet, or their designees are:

**Senator Nan Rich** for the Senate President  
**Representative Lorraine Ausley** for the Speaker of the House  
**Maureen S. Dinnen** for the Chief Financial Officer  
**Chief Justice Fred Lewis** for the Florida Supreme Court  
**Deputy Attorney General Cynthia Guerra** for the Attorney General

Additionally, the Governor appointed five members from around the state who are representatives of children and youth advocacy organizations, but who are not service providers, including:

**Judy Schaechter**, physician and professor at the University of Miami,  
Mailman Center for Child Development  
**David Lawrence Jr.**, President of the Early Childhood Initiative Foundation in  
Miami and "University Scholar for Early Childhood Development and  
Readiness" at the University of Florida  
**Donna Gay Lancaster**, Executive Director of Juvenile Welfare Board,  
Children's Services Council of Pinellas County  
**Antonia Crawford**, Chairman of the Early Learning Coalition  
**Dick Batchelor**, President of Dick Batchelor Management Group

In compliance with the Florida Statute, by June 2008 the Cabinet meetings will be held in all regions of the state in an effort to provide an accessible and open forums. The public has had opportunities to make comments or presentations before the Cabinet at every meeting. When and where feasible, Cabinet meetings are being co-located with other related conferences and workshops around the state to enhance citizen opportunities and attendance. All meetings are published in the Florida Administrative Weekly and are documented by the Florida Channel and various news organizations including Florida Public Radio.

In order to ensure the public has complete access and up-to-date information, Cabinet staff has created a webpage that contains information about the Cabinet, its members, activities, and meeting dates and locations.

To date, the Cabinet has met three times in the 2007-2008 Fiscal Year including, October 1 in Tallahassee, October 30 in Tampa and an interim meeting was held on December 5 in Tallahassee.

- The October 1 organizational meeting was an opportunity for the Cabinet members to meet each other and share their ideas and vision for the issues to come before the Cabinet.
- During the October 30 meeting, the Cabinet developed their vision statement and mission statement, and then began their discussion on the statutorily required Strategic Plan.
- At the December 5 interim meeting, Cabinet members completed their Strategic Plan with the assistance of a professional meeting facilitator. All work products of the Cabinet can be viewed and downloaded from the Children and Youth Cabinet webpage.

Future Cabinet meetings for the remainder of the 2007-2008 Fiscal Year include: January 22, 2008 in Orlando, February 15, 2008 in Miramar, April 1, 2008 in Tallahassee and May 2008 in Jacksonville.

### **Chief Child Advocate**

On July 1, 2007, former State Representative Jim Kallinger was appointed to be Florida's Chief Child Advocate. In addition to managing the Office of Adoption and Child Protection, and making sure its duties and responsibilities are being met, the Chief Child Advocate is the Governor's liaison with state agencies, other state governments and the public and private sectors on matters that relate to the promotion of adoption, support of adoptive parents and child abuse prevention.

This past year, the Chief Child Advocate had the opportunity to interact with various stakeholders in the child welfare arena by conducting site visits with most of the community-based care lead agencies around the state and with numerous local service providers and organizations as well. He has also met with various groups of concerned citizens to listen to their issues and ideas, and then convey those messages into the appropriate discussions at the state level. At a broader perspective, he participated in a Regional Roundtable with policy makers from eight other Southern states to investigate the barriers to adoption.

As the month of November was National Adoption Month, the Chief Child Advocate visited many of the mass adoption ceremonies around the state to recognize the commitment and sacrifice being made by the numerous adoptive parents. These courageous Floridians have opened their hearts and homes to Florida's children in need. The special circuit judges who are making a real difference in the lives of many children by expediting the dependency court process were also recognized for their heroic deeds. We hope to see more judges around our state put the same effort into accelerating the placement of Florida's children into permanent homes.

In December, the U.S. Department of State contacted the Office regarding a video conference with Russian officials who wanted to explore the foster care system in Florida and how they might be able to replicate some key aspects of it in their own region through legislation. In addition to the Florida delegation led by the Chief Child Advocate, participating in the call were members of the Sverdlovsk Oblast Duma (Legislative Assembly) and representatives from their Ministry of Education and Ministry of Social Protection. The Florida delegation was able to highlight the advantages of our community-based system of care and the positive effects it has on the well-being of Florida's families and children. At the conclusion of the meeting, the Chief Child Advocate invited the Russian delegation and agreed to host a visit to Florida for them to see, first hand, how our foster care system is succeeding.

The Chief Child Advocate is Chairman of the Child Abuse Prevention and Permanency Advisory Council. He also serves on the Department of Children and Families' Task Force on Child Protection and is a member of Florida's Children and Youth Cabinet.

## **Other**

Earlier in the year, a need was identified to better respond to Floridians who had issues and concerns about our child welfare system. The Office had a meeting with the Governor's Office of Citizen Services to explore and discuss ways to better coordinate the resources and knowledge of the Office with the commendable efforts of Citizen's Services. As a result, a citizen response triage was implemented, thereby providing an opportunity for the Office to be more proactive with those citizens who had the greatest need.

Various workshops were organized this year at two different state-wide conferences in order to exhibit some of the work of the Office. At the Dependency Court Summit in Orlando, the Office held a workshop to exhibit and discuss the statutory duties and responsibilities of the new office of Adoption and Child Protection, including the progress of Child Abuse Prevention and Permanency Advisory Council and Children and Youth Cabinet. At the Florida Coalition of Children Conference in Jacksonville, the Office collaborated with the Department of Children and Families to conduct a workshop regarding the most recently captured data on child maltreatment rates in Florida, including an open discussion on recommendations for solutions to the problem.

## Part 2 – Status of Adoptions and Child Maltreatment in Florida

### Summary of Adoption Data

#### ***Adoption Data Reported by the Department of Children and Families to the Federal Administration for Children and Families via the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS)***

On January 23, 2007, The Federal Administration for Children and Families (ACF) published new federal child welfare outcome measures, including five measures related to the timeliness of adoptions from foster care. For each of the five measures, Florida set targets based on FFY2004 national 75<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> percentiles in order to achieve substantial conformity on the January 2008 Child and Family Services Review. As described below, Florida has exceeded its target for four of the five measures and has been steadily approaching the target for the fifth measure.

Performance on these and other new measures will be used in the January 2008 Child and Family Services Review. Performance information is based on the 12-month period from April 2006 to March 2007, using the most recent available data for this review. It should be noted that for the information provided below, comparisons will be made using prior federal fiscal years (FFY) which span the months October through September. For example, FFY2004 spans October 2003 through September 2004.

#### Measure 1 – Percent Discharged in Less than 24 Months

Of all children who were discharged from foster care to a finalized adoption during the period April 2006 through March 2007, **36.7 percent were discharged in less than 24 months from the date of the latest removal from home.** The target was to reach the national 75<sup>th</sup> percentile for FFY2004 which is 36.6 percent. **Florida has exceeded this target.** Florida has made steady progress on this measure over the last several years, increasing from 23.9 percent in FFY2004 to 36.7 percent in the period April 2006 through March 2007. This measure is limited to children adopted during the period, so it does not address the likelihood that children presently in care will be adopted within 24 months.

#### Measure 2 – Median Length of Stay in Foster Care

Of all children adopted from foster care during the period April 2006 through March 2007, the **median length of stay in foster care was 29.3 months from the date of latest removal from home to the date of discharge to adoption.** The target was to reach the national 25<sup>th</sup> percentile for FFY2004 which is 27.3

months. **Florida has not yet met this target.** This measure, like the first measure, is limited to children adopted during the period, so it only describes the length of stay of this particular group of adopted children. Florida's median has dropped for several years, from 35.1 months in FFY 2004 to 29.3 months in the period April 2006 through March 2007. Not reaching this target may reflect diverted efforts to find adoptive homes for the many children who have been in care for several years.

#### Measure 3 – Finalized Adoptions

Of all children who were in foster care on the first day of April 2006, and who had been in foster care for 17 continuous months or longer, **24.8 percent were discharged from foster care to a finalized adoption by March 31, 2007.** The target was to reach the national 75<sup>th</sup> percentile for FFY2004 which is 22.7 percent. **Florida has exceeded this target** for each of the last four federal fiscal years. This measure provides one way of looking at the likelihood of children being adopted who have been in care for a long period of time. It selects all children who were in care at the beginning of the period and follows up after 12 months to see whether they have been adopted. This measure excludes children who, by the last day of the period, have achieved permanency through reunification with parents or primary caretakers, living with other relatives, or guardianship.

#### Measure 4 – Legally Free for Adoption

Of all children who were in foster care on the first day of April 2006, who had been in foster care for 17 continuous months or longer, and who were not legally free for adoption prior to that day, **13.7 percent became legally free for adoption** during the first six months of the period. The target was to reach the national 75<sup>th</sup> percentile for FFY2004 which is 10.9 percent. **Florida has exceeded this target** for three of the last four federal fiscal years. This measure reflects how quickly Florida moved to obtain termination of parental rights (TPR) when it appeared that reunification was no longer a viable option. This measure excludes children who did not become legally free during the first six months of the period, but who, during that six-month period, achieved permanency through reunification with parents or primary caretakers, living with other relatives, or guardianship.

#### Measure 5 – Adoption within 12 Months

Of all children who became legally free for adoption during the preceding 12-month period, **60.9 percent were adopted within 12 months of becoming legally free.** The target was to reach the national 75<sup>th</sup> percentile for FFY2004 which is 53.7 percent. **Florida has exceeded this target** for three of the last four reporting years. This measure reflects how quickly Florida finalizes adoptions after the termination of parental rights. Florida has made steady progress over the last few years, from 47.4 percent in FFY 2004 (October 2003 – September 2004) to 60.9 percent in April 2006 – March 07.

## ***Timeliness of the Adoption Process for Children Adopted from within the Child Welfare System***

In the state fiscal year July 2006 through June 2007 (SFY2007), 3,079 adoptions from the child welfare system were finalized in Florida. Three-quarters of these adopted children were taken into the families of loving foster parents or relatives: **40 percent** were adopted by foster parents and **36 percent** were adopted by relatives respectively. The remaining **24 percent** of those children were adopted by families who were recruited for them.

In order to assess the timeliness of the adoption process, the Department of Children and Families submitted three other types of data describing the timeliness of adoptions to the Executive Office of the Governor in December 2007.

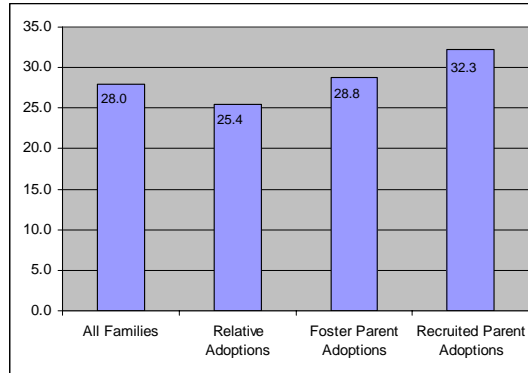
- Data describing the median length of stay in care for children adopted in SFY 2006-07. The median was broken down by the time from removal to Termination of Parental Rights (TPR) and the time from TPR to finalization. The data were analyzed by the relationship of adoptive parents, including foster parents, relatives, and recruited families.
- Data describing the proportion of children available for adoption on July 1, 2006 who were adopted by June 30, 2007. The proportions adopted were broken down by age group and race group.
- Data describing the children available for adoption on November 1, 2007, including age group, race group and time in care.

### Measure 1 – Median Length of Stay in Foster Care (From Date of Removal through Date of Adoption Finalization)

Complete and verified data sets were available and provided for 2,745 of the 3,079 children who were adopted in SFY 2006-07, an 89 percent sample. Thus this section reports timeliness information based upon the sample of children for whom the data were complete.

Based on the sample of data, the statewide median for all children adopted by all adoptive parent groups was 28 months from removal to finalization; half had longer stays and half had shorter stays. As one might expect, the median length of stay was longest for those children who were adopted by parents that were recruited for them, and the shortest length of stay was for children who were adopted by their relatives. ***The national target of 27.3 months was met for those adoptions by relatives. It was not met for the other two adoptive parent groups – foster parents and recruited parents.***

**Median Length of Stay (Months) for Children Adopted in Florida in FY 2006-2007**



Understanding where delays occur is useful for improving the process and shortening the time for removal to adoption. For example, it should be useful to know whether a long median length of stay is the result of delays in securing termination of parental rights or the result of delays in recruiting an adoptive home, placing the child and finalizing the adoption. Three data points (i.e., removal date, TPR date and adoption finalization date) were used to break the median total length of stay into two intervals:

- Median length of stay from the point of removal through the date of termination of parental rights was ordered.
- Median length of stay from date of the termination of parental rights through the date adoption was finalized.

As shown below, the median time from removal to termination of parental rights (TPR) was 20 months for all families; with relative adoptions the lowest at 18.2 and the others at 21.7 months. The median time from TPR to adoption finalization was eight months statewide with relative and foster parent adoptions the lowest at 7 months and recruited parents adoptions at 10.6 months. That is, once the children were legally free for adoption, those who were adopted had their adoptions finalized within a median time period of 7.1 to 10.6 months, depending on the adopting parents.

**Median Length of Stay (Months) for Children Adopted in Florida in FY 2006-2007**

Adoptive Families	Median Time from Removal to TPR	Median Time from TPR to Adoption	Median Total Length of Stay
Relative Adoptions	18.2	7.2	25.4
Foster Parent Adoptions	21.7	7.1	28.8
Recruited Parent Adoptions	21.7	10.6	32.3
<b>All Families</b>	<b>20.0</b>	<b>8.0</b>	<b>28.0</b>

Measure 2 – Likelihood of Adoption by Age Group and Race Group

The Department of Children and Families provided data to describe the likelihood of adoption by age and race groups. Of the 4,117 children available for adoption on July 1, 2006, 1,801 (43.7%) were adopted by June 30, 2007. However, the proportions were very different for different age and race groups.

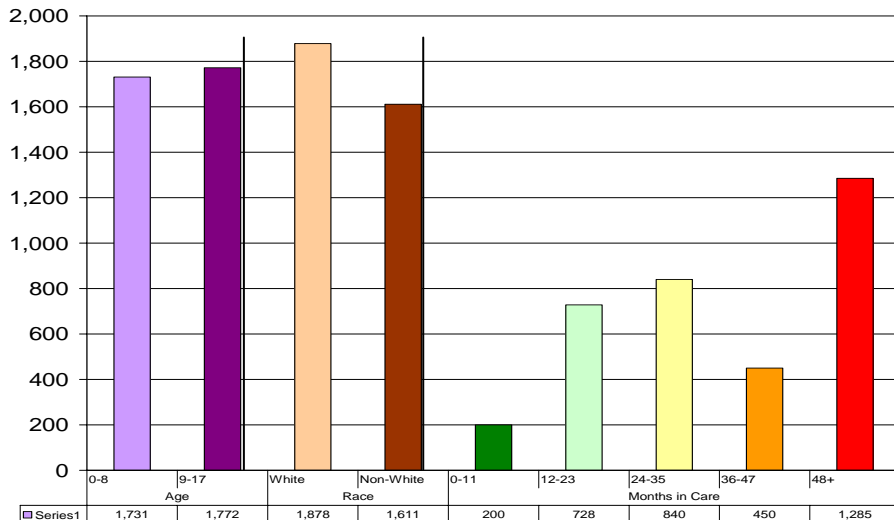
- Of the 1,932 children **ages 0-8** available for adoption on July 1, 2006, 1,304 (67.5%) were adopted by June 30, 2007.
- However, of the 2,185 children **ages 9-17** available for adoption on July 1, 2006, 497 (22.7%) were adopted by June 30, 2007.
- Of the 2,214 **white** children available for adoption on July 1, 2006, 1,166 (52.7%) were adopted by June 30, 2007.
- However, of the 1,884 **non-white** children available for adoption on July 1, 2006, 624 (33.1%) were adopted by June 30, 2007.

The significantly lower proportions for adoptions of older children and non-white children indicate that these groups present a greater challenge and should receive special attention in the future.

Measure 3 – Children Waiting for Adoption

The Department of Children and Families' data describe the 3,503 children available for adoption from the Florida child welfare system as of November 1, 2007. Age and length of time in care were available for all children, and racial information was available for 3,489 (99.6%) of the children.

**Number of Children Available for Adoption by Age, Race and Months in Care**



As shown in the chart above, just under half (49%) of the children are between the ages of birth through eight and just over half are between the ages of nine through 17. Over half (54%) of the children are white and over a third (37%) have been waiting to be adopted for four or more years.

To better understand these children available for adoption, the Department of Children and Families provided analyses of their age groups and ethnicities by the length of time in care. Their findings are important and will be of assistance to the state in the recruitment of adoptive families for these children.

Children who become available for adoption often wait longer for a permanent home if they are older. Of the children awaiting adoption as of November 1, 2007, those who are 9-17 years of age are almost four times as likely to have been in care 48 months or longer than those who are 0-8 years of age.

Similarly, non-white children are over-represented in the group of children who have been waiting longest for adoptive parents. Of 2,210 children awaiting adoption as of November 1, 2007 who have been in care less than four years, 1,338 (61%) are white. However, of 1,279 children awaiting adoption as of November 1, 2007 who have been in care more than four years, 739 (58%) are non-white. That is, while the number of white children available for adoption exceeds non-white children for the first 47 months they are in care and waiting for permanent homes, by the 48<sup>th</sup> month, non-white children comprise the largest group of those children waiting to be adopted.

## **Summary of Child Maltreatment Data**

Child maltreatment is an all inclusive term for child abuse, abandonment and neglect. Four data sources from the Florida Department of Children and Families were used for this section of the report. These sources include:

- *HomeSafenet* data sets provided to the Executive Office of the Governor in November 2007 (July 2006 – May 2007 data annualized to 12 months)
- The presentation made to the Florida Coalition for Children conference in November 2007
- The 2007 Progress Report of the State Plan on Prevention delivered to the Child Abuse Prevention and Permanency Advisory Council in October 2007 (July 2006 – June 2007 data)
- A draft report provided by the Department of Children and Families to the Executive Office of the Governor in December 2007

These sets of data and information have been aggregated in order to describe the status of child maltreatment in Florida.

***Primary Outcomes for the State Plan for the Prevention of Child Abuse, Abandonment and Neglect: July 2005 though June 2010***

Florida currently has in place a *State Plan for the Prevention of Child Abuse, Abandonment and Neglect: July 2005 though June 2010*. This plan was developed in accordance with federal and state requirements. The vision, mission and goals of the plan are as follows:

***Vision:***

Florida's highest priority is that children are raised in healthy, safe, stable and nurturing families.

***Mission:***

To serve as a blueprint that will be implemented to provide for the care, safety and protection of all of Florida's children in an environment that fosters healthy social, emotional, intellectual and physical development.

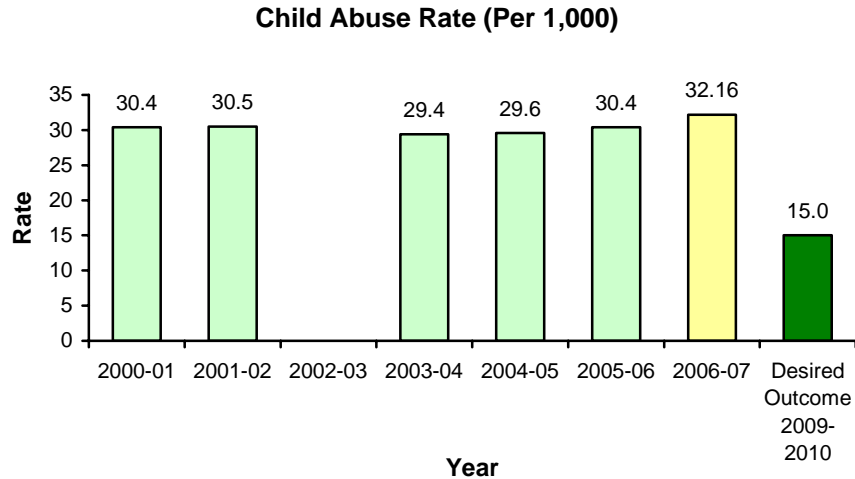
***Goals:***

1. All families and communities ensure that children are safe and nurtured and live in stable environments that promote well-being.
2. State, local, and community resources comprise a collaborative, responsive, family-centered service delivery system that promotes the well-being and safety of children, families, and communities.
3. The prevention continuum has the capacity to ensure the needs of children and families will be addressed competently, collaboratively and effectively.
4. The prevention continuum's accountability system ensures the evidence-based effectiveness of planning and resource utilization.

There are two primary outcomes specified in the state's five-year plan, one dealing with child maltreatment and one dealing with re-abuse of children who have been served by Florida's child welfare system. The 2007 Progress Report provides data on the movement made toward the accomplishment of the plan's outcomes, including data preceding the implementation of the plan.

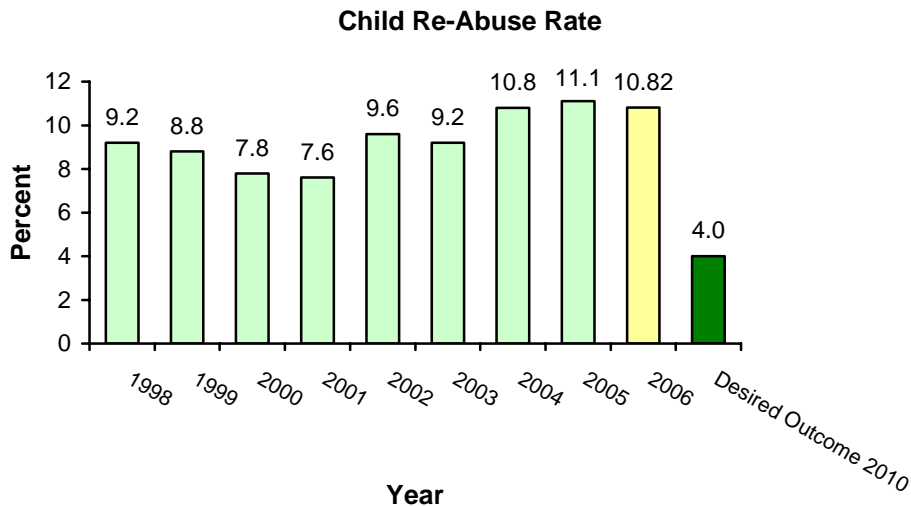
First Primary Outcome – Child Abuse Rates

By June 30, 2010, the child abuse rate will be reduced from the fiscal year 2003-04 statewide rate of 29.4 to 15.0 per 1,000 children. Below are the results provided in the 2007 Progress Report for the July – June state fiscal years: SFY2001 through SFY2007:



Second Primary Outcome – Re-Abuse Rates

By June 30, 2010, the re-abuse rate within six months of initial abuse will be reduced from the 2003 statewide rate of 9.2 percent to 4.0 percent. Below are the results provided in the 2007 Progress Report for the calendar years (January – December) 1998 through 2006:



Child abuse rates have increased again this latest state fiscal year. At the same time, although child re-abuse rates have increased since the start of the plan, there was a slight reduction in this rate for this past year. These data show that, despite current efforts to reduce abuse and re-abuse rates, **Florida's children are facing an increased risk for abuse and neglect.** There needs to be a refocus of efforts to effectively address the risks in our communities that contribute to rising levels of abuse and neglect.

## **Status of Child Maltreatment in Florida**

The *incidence* of child maltreatment is the estimated number of maltreated children in Florida, regardless of the number of children reported as abused. Data from the 3rd National Incidence Study (NIS-3, to be released by the end of 2008) suggests that only about 30 percent of all maltreated children were actually investigated. Thus it would be expected that reporting and investigation rates would be low, conservative estimates of the actual abuse incident rates in Florida.

Florida's Abuse Hotline is the central toll-free (1-800-96-ABUSE) statewide access point for reporting suspected child maltreatment. Based upon the unduplicated data provided by the Florida Department of Children and Families in December 2007, during SFY2007 (State Fiscal Year July 2006 – June 2007), the hotline received calls concerning **240,263 alleged victims of child maltreatment**. This is a **statewide reporting rate of 57.9 alleged victims** per 1,000 children (birth - 17) in Florida. Of these, **117,795 (49%) were found to be substantiated** with findings of verified child maltreatment or some indication of it. This results in a **statewide victimization rate of 28.4 maltreated children** per 1,000 children (birth – 17) in Florida.

Since SFY2004, the number of alleged victims has increased by over 18,000 children with a substantial increase of almost 12,000 children from SFY2005 to SFY2006. During this same three-year period, the number of substantiated victims has remained relatively steady with a spike of 121,202 substantiated victims in SFY2006 and a subsequent drop by 3,400 for this past year.

The Department of Children and Families' *HomeSafenet* database provides reports on the most serious finding in each case report for each major maltreatment type. For example, if there are three children in a single case report with a "verified for physical abuse," this will count as only one physical abuse maltreatment finding. As shown in the table below, for the state fiscal year, July 2006 – June 2007, the most serious findings substantiated in the 83,132 child maltreatment cases are Neglect and Threatened Harm.

### **Most Serious Maltreatment Findings per Case in SFY2007**

<b>Number Of Cases</b>	<b>Percent Of Cases</b>	<b>SFY2007 Most Serious Maltreatment Finding</b>
2,783	3.35%	Physical Abuse
4,654	5.60%	Sexual Abuse
36,153	43.49%	Threatened Harm
<u>39,542</u>	<u>47.57%</u>	<u>Neglect</u>
83,132	100.00%	Total Number of Cases

Using a separate analysis, the *HomeSafenet* data system recorded the primary reasons for service of the children entering into foster care. Of the 7,886 children entering foster care in the six month span from October 2006 - March 2007, 11,061 reasons for service were reported. These are shown in the table below.

**Reasons for Services Reported in October 2006 – March 2007**

<b>Number of Children</b>	<b>Percent of 7,886 Children</b>	<b>Service Reason</b>
655	8.33%	Abandonment
994	12.64%	Inadequate housing
1,371	17.43%	Physical abuse
2,799	35.58%	Neglect
3,167	40.26%	Parental drug abuse

As shown in the table above, parental drug use was the most often cited reason for 40 percent of the children entering care. As a result, it is logical that the second most cited service reason for care was neglect, for 36 percent of the children taken into care.

## **Part 3 – Recommendations and Requests**

The following is a summary of the policy recommendations and budget requests from the various affected state agencies for the further development of services and programs for the promotion of adoption, support of adoptive families and prevention of child abuse and neglect. This summary is by no means to be considered all inclusive, by error or intent.

The agencies recommendations and budget requests are not listed in any particular order, and they do not reflect in any way the priorities of the Executive Office of the Governor. This summary of agency recommendations may or may not even reflect the priorities of an agency, but it does show their level of commitment to these particular issues. By identifying the different, and sometimes similar, recommendations and budget requests among the various state agencies, a dialogue will be created, duplicity of effort will diminish and better cooperation and collaboration between the agencies will be the result.

### **Agency Policy Recommendations**

Seven of the state agencies provided policy recommendations related to the prevention of abuse, abandonment and neglect. These recommendations are summarized below by state agency.

#### ***Agency for Persons with Disabilities (APD)***

- Access to Specialized Services – Beyond the Medicaid State Plan, specialized services are needed for children with developmental disabilities and those with complex mental health/behavioral needs (Dual Diagnosis). If Medicaid Home and Community-Based Waiver funding is not in place for a child with a dual diagnosis, this may serve as either a deterrent to potential adoptive parents or, potentially, be the cause for an adoption to disrupt.
- Dual Diagnosis – There is an area of growing concern with regards to children and youth that have various types of complex mental health/behavioral needs (dual diagnosis). Targeted resource development is necessary to enhance both the in-home (wraparound or overlay) and residential services capacity to meet this need. Since the services delivery system in developmental disabilities and mental health is fully privatized, this would require collaborating with the private market. Prior study of this issue indicates that traditional mental health, or developmental disabilities providers, may not have the technical/resource capacity to meet this population with more severe or intensive needs. A more detailed study and assessment of this issue is

needed, as well as identification and roll-out of evidenced based best practices, strategic resource development, and training/supervision/quality management of this specialized service delivery approach. Studies indicate a much higher prevalence of mental health disorders among children who both have experienced abuse/neglect and, subsequently, have been involved in the foster care system. Both legislative direction and funding would assist in this issue.

- Promotion of Adopting Children with Special Needs – Children with developmental disabilities appear to be more difficult to place for adoption than the general child welfare population. Ongoing collaboration and information sharing between the Department of Children and Families, APD and the Community-Based Care lead agencies is needed to identify children with special needs who are eligible for adoption. Enhancing the available supports/services/benefits package for adoptive families would potentially encourage more adoptions of children with special needs. The promotion and public awareness of children with special needs available for adoption needs to be ongoing with a focus on de-stigmatization. This would require additional legislative appropriations.

### ***Agency for Workforce Innovation (AWI)***

- The Agency for Workforce Innovation is committed to serving all children that are at risk of abuse, neglect or abandonment. By providing services for all children along the continuum that are at risk of abuse, neglect or abandonment it guarantees safety first. In order to provide services for all at-risk children from birth to age twelve, the Agency has prioritized a legislative budget request to ensure sufficient funding. Recognizing that this is a tight budget year, the Agency is dedicated to exploring other funding sources and potential partnerships to ensure the health, safety and welfare of these children.
- As the lead agency for the administration of the federal Child Care and Development Fund Plan (CCDF), the Agency for Workforce Innovation has committed to providing support to adoptive families. Through the approved 2007-2009 CCDF Plan, the Agency has revised the eligibility calculations for children who receive adoption subsidy payments to promote access to services in order to strengthen Florida's families.

## ***Department of Children and Families (DCF)***

- Adjudication of Dependency – Amend Subsection 39.507(9), F.S. to emphasize to the trial courts and Chapter 39 practitioners that dependency is an issue of the child’s status (i.e. abused, neglected or abandoned) and not a status conditional as to individual parents. Dependency should be determined with respect to what happened to the child, and not with respect to one parent or the other who engaged in the harmful conduct.
- Child-on-Child Investigations – Revise statutory language in Section 39.201, F.S. to better define child-on-child investigations. The purpose is to determine if the sexual interaction was part of developmentally appropriate sexual exploration or an actual sexual offense. If it is determined that the alleged incident involved a sexual offense, the main focus of the statute is to provide the appropriate treatment to both the children involved in the incident. Criminal intervention is only required when the need for services has been identified through a multi-disciplinary staffing and the family refuses services. Non-predatory situations are described as dependency service “referrals” not “investigations”, and use the terminology of “child with sexual behavior problem” to avoid the more stigmatizing label of “alleged juvenile sexual offender”.
- Facilitate Release of Records – Amend Section 39.202, F.S. to allow for public release of child abuse records, without the requirement that the Department petition a court for the public release of these records, where there is a verified determination that the child was a victim of abuse, abandonment or neglect. Current law only allows for the public release of child abuse investigations where there is a determination that the child’s death was the result of abuse, abandonment or neglect.
- Protection from Domestic Violence – Enhance the ability of DCF to protect children in families in which domestic violence is occurring by taking into account the damage that can be done to a child in an environment where one or both parents inflict significant violence upon the other, and support dependency or termination of parental rights if the abuse occurs in the presence of the child.
- Foster Care Licensure – Clarify Chapter 39 requirements for judicial approval of non-relative care placements, to include limitations on placement based on age of child and permanent guardianship or foster care licensure expectations. Additional judicial oversight and licensure of non-relative placements will result in needed safeguards for children in this placement option.

- Background Screening – Align provisions and remove confusing and conflicting language in Section 39.401, F.S. related to background screening requirements for relatives, non-relatives, foster parents and other potential caregivers for children who are the subjects of Chapter 39 proceedings.
- Judicial Review Hearings – Ensure that a foster child’s caregiver (foster parents and pre-adoptive parents), those with the most information about the child’s current circumstances, are given the opportunity to provide input to the court in key decisions about the child, in all types of court proceedings.
- Child Welfare Injunction – Strengthen the provisions of Section 39.504, F.S. (child welfare injunction statute) so that it is more useful for child welfare cases when domestic violence is involved. This will create a more effective working relationship between child welfare workers and domestic violence advocates, potentially increasing both child and adult safety.
- Pre-disposition Reports – Eliminate the preparation of pre-disposition reports that are duplicative as required in Section 39.521, F.S. Presently, social workers are required to develop the same family and child assessments and related information in multiple formats. This will result in efficiencies and improve casework performance.
- Missing Child Reports – Clarify when law enforcement should take a missing child report, especially when a child is alleged to be in the company of a biological parent who flees during an open child abuse investigation or open protective supervision case. This would enhance the Department’s ability to locate missing children by taking advantage of law enforcement’s expertise and broader resources in locating missing persons.
- Article 120 Hearings – Establish procedures in Section 39.4072, F.S. to clearly identify an adult who can request an Article 120 hearing for any denial of services for Medicaid when the parental rights of a child’s parents have been terminated, or their parents are not able or willing to represent them and a legal guardian has not otherwise been appointed.
- Interstate Compact for the Placement of Children – Revise Section 409.401, F.S. to provide a process through which children subject to this compact are placed in safe and suitable homes in a timely manner, facilitate communication between the states, provide for uniform data collection and information sharing between member states. Also provide for a state’s continuing legal jurisdiction and responsibility for placement and care of a child that it would have had if the placement were intrastate.

### ***Department of Corrections (DOC)***

- Parenting Classes – Resources are needed to provide parenting classes for inmates.
- Inmates with Children – More flexibility is needed to move inmate mothers closer to their children. DOC lacks the capacity to effectively accomplish this on a meaningful scale. A pilot project was tried in the Miami-Dade area a few years ago. Others are working on obtaining grants for this issue.
- Employee Adoption Incentives – Continued funding for the state employee adoption incentive program is appropriate.

### ***Department of Education (DOE)***

- Training on Child Abuse and Neglect – Ensure that DOE and public schools fulfill their critical support roles in the prevention of child abuse and neglect. Specifically, school personnel are under the obligation to report all actual or suspected cases of child abuse, abandonment or neglect, and are also required, if requested by DCF, to act as a liaison between DCF and the child protection team in instances of suspected abuse, abandonment or neglect. Additionally, DOE is represented on the State Child Abuse Death Review Team and produces teacher training materials on child abuse that are distributed to all schools.
- Tuition Waivers – The Road to Independence program provides a tuition exemption for all public post-secondary education for any student who was in the custody of a relative at the time he or she reached 18 years of age, or was adopted from the DCF system. This exemption is available for four years following high school graduation. In 2006-07 the total appropriation for the program was \$13,981,115. In 2006-07, a total of 2,246 students received an average award amount of \$6,224.90.

### ***Department of Health (DOH)***

- Medical Foster Care Program – It is recommended that information about the Medical Foster Care Program be included in the orientation training of new DCF employees and their contract agents' employees such as protective investigators, licensing counselors, foster care case managers, protective services case managers, and adoption case managers and their supervisors. This will assist in the rate of appropriate referrals of abused and neglected children with special health care needs to the most suitable venue. Community-Based Care (CBC) agencies have standardized processes to reduce disparity of services between agencies.

- Foster Care Staff Turnover – Eliminating frequent foster care staff turnover would enhance services to children in foster care and reduce rates of abuse and neglect that occurs in foster care. Additional funding to increase the number of foster care and adoptions staff would reduce the size of the caseloads and improve services, including the areas of child monitoring and court preparation.

### ***Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE)***

- Background Checks – If all private schools are mandated to do background checks, it is strongly suggested that the proper legislative language be used to avoid any contentious issues. If pursued, it is recommended that it be accomplished under the governor’s executive authority, as in the Adam Walsh Act, so that FDLE would be allowed to pass the criminal history back to the private school.
- School Standards – It is recommended that all private schools and schools that receive “McKay” scholarship monies conform to the same standards as public schools, such as background checks and fingerprinting.
- Child Abuse Death Review Team – Expand the purview of the State Child Abuse Death Review Team to include the review ALL child deaths.
- Child Abuse Training – It is recommended that current certified teachers and college students who are education majors receive training that includes identifying the signs and symptoms of child abuse and the laws relating to the reporting of such abuse.

## Agency Budget Requests

Three of the state agencies provided information about their budget requests and needs related to the prevention of abuse, abandonment and neglect. These recommendations are summarized below by state agency.  
nurturing

### ***Department of Children and Families (DCF)***

- Increase Adoptions Benefits funding based on the passage of HB 803 – DCF requests **\$570,000** to provide adoptions benefits for the expanded group of eligible government employees (i.e. state and community colleges, county school districts), and for the increased workload to DCF. Eligible employees may receive a \$10,000 benefit if the employee adopts a special needs child or a \$5,000 benefit if the employee adopts a non-special needs child from the DCF system.
- Post Adoption Stabilization Services – DCF requests **\$1,375,000** to establish a post-adoption services family support counselor for each of the 22 Community Based Care lead agencies in order to implement a comprehensive statewide approach, based on local community needs assessments, to address post-adoptive services and support for adoptive families.
- Restore Non-recurring Healthy Families Expansion – DCF requests **\$2,200,000** in recurring General Revenue to continue providing voluntary, home visiting services designed to prevent the removal of children from their homes by replacing non-recurring with recurring funding for the 14-county expansion of Healthy Families Florida in Fiscal Year 07-08. Counties to be expanded include Jefferson, Madison, Taylor, Hamilton, Lafayette, Highlands, Bradford, Columbia, Union, Hardee, Hernando, Okeechobee, Suwannee and Citrus.
- Maintenance Adoption Subsidies – DCF requests **\$14,993,681** for Maintenance Adoption Subsidies (MAS) in recurring state and federal funds. It will support the existing adoption subsidy clients as well as projected need for Fiscal Year 2008-09.
- Abuse Hotline Workload – DCF requests **\$891,966** and 17 Full-Time Equivalent (FTEs) positions to support the work of the hotline.
- One Church One Child – DCF requests **\$150,000** to fund operations for the One Church One Child adoption and support efforts.

### ***Department of Health (DOH)***

- Medical Services for Abused and Neglected Children – DOH requests **\$3,600,000** to support medical services to abused and neglected children. This request is for additional funding for multidisciplinary services, follow-up activities and community education services. Section 39.303 FS requires DOH to provide a statewide system of medical professionals to support multidisciplinary Child Protection Teams (CPTs). The teams are mandated to provide multidisciplinary evaluation and assessment services to all children meeting referral criteria. The teams do not see all children alleged to have been abused as mandated because the lack resources to conduct appropriate follow-up activities. They are also required to provide training services for program and other employees of the DCF, DOH and other medical professions as well as provide educational and community awareness campaigns. These services are severely limited due to scarce resources. The funding increase will allow the department to serve an additional 3,500 children at service level required by the Statute.

### ***Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ)***

- Domestic Violence – DJJ requests **\$2.3 million** to provide alternatives (i.e. Civil Citation, respite in a Children in Need of Services/Families in Need of Services (CINS/FINS) shelter and family intervention assistance) to certain youth taken into custody on domestic violence charges. Children who commit domestic violence often are victims of violence in the home, and alternative services could include family intervention and assistance, as appropriate.

## **Additional Informants in the Development of Recommendations**

In addition to reporting the above information provided by the state agencies affected by the planning process, the Office queried a broader sample of informants. In September 2007, representatives from the 20 Department of Children and Families circuit offices were asked to share their recommendations for lowering the child maltreatment rates in their areas. In November 2007, at the Florida Coalition for Children Conference, 33 representatives from child-serving agencies and organizations around Florida provided their suggestions and ideas for identifying and recognizing “touch points” for preventing maltreatment in their communities. Also in November 2007, the Child Abuse Prevention and Permanency Advisory Council deliberated on this issue. Analyses of the conversations and suggestions resulting from these three separate queries are provided below.

### ***Aggregation of Circuit Representatives' Suggestions and Ideas***

State and local funded agencies, private for-profit and non-profit organizations and community partners will need to work as a team. Each circuit should foster communities where “everyone knows everyone, knows their needs, and everyone pitches in” to be able to help their children and their families. Community members should be equipped to advocate for local families, know about the formal and informal services available in their areas and call for information on other services that may be outside their areas. Community providers need to work as one instead of operating as disjointed, separate agencies. Some steps that would assist in achieving this:

- Cross train all community providers and members regarding prevention and protection, and what is considered an abuse report.
- Make strong connections with communities and work with families that have issues prior to them rising to the level of an abuse call. Knowledge of resources available to these families.
- Work with families through the schools.
- Engage the entire community in development, planning and teaching efforts.
- Develop a Children’s Advisory Board or Human Services Board in each circuit or county.
- Use voluntary protective services.
- Improve community prevention efforts and strengthen case management activities.

## ***Aggregation of Child-Serving Agencies' Suggestions and Ideas***

In November 2007, at the Florida Coalition for Children Conference, 33 representatives from child-serving agencies and organizations from around the state provided their suggestions and ideas for identifying and recognizing “touch points” for preventing maltreatment in their communities. An aggregation of the ideas and suggestions offered is provided below. The lists are not in any particular order.

### *Recommendations Supporting Primary and Secondary Prevention:*

- State funded agencies should implement a strong local process for interagency communication, cooperation and collaboration.
- Provide access to relationship skills education programs for children, youth and adults, focusing especially on those evidence-based programs that teach interpersonal problem solving, stress and anger management and parenting skills (even before children are born).
- Fully fund voluntary home visiting programs to meet the actual need of Florida’s most vulnerable families. These programs have proven effective in preventing child maltreatment.
- Unify the various prevention-focused groups in each community and support neighborhood partnership programs.
- Address building “social capital” in those neighborhoods experiencing distress, poverty, etc.
- Provide respite options (e.g., respite shelter, crisis nurseries, mom’s day out, etc.) for families before they and their children enter the service system.

### *Recommendations Supporting Reduced Rates of Entry into Child Welfare System:*

- Foster care may be avoidable for many children and families when appropriate and sufficient wrap around supports and services are available and used for families in the investigation process.
- Safety and risk assessment skills enhancement should be provided for protective investigators and other partners working with Florida’s most vulnerable families.

### *Identified “Touch Points” for Implementing Prevention Programs as a Community-wide Effort:*

- Make available training and information about prevention, risk assessment and resource referral through the following touch points (not listed in any particular order and not all inclusive) so that all can contribute to prevention efforts.

- The Florida Abuse Hotline and the Florida Helpline, which receive calls from distressed families in addition to those related to actual child maltreatment
- Preschool teachers and staff members who see parents and children and could provide and encourage accessing supports and assistance from the community
- Educators – Teachers and school staff members who come in contact with all school-age children daily
- Children in school who are “captive audiences” to learn skills that they may not learn at home and to contribute to ameliorating the effects of trauma experienced by some of the children
- Children in child welfare selected for enhanced educational supports and services
- Health Care – Health department and health care practitioners who see families and children at different times in their lives
- Pregnant mothers and fathers accessing prenatal support and teaching
- Hospital and maternity delivery sites who see parents at the birth of their children
- Emergency rooms that see families in distress
- Economic support services as a point of screening, information sharing and resource referral
- Out-posting of public-funded agency staff members in higher-risk areas and neighborhoods
- Guardian advocates for children with disabilities who could assist families with navigating service systems and advocating for their children
- Parent support groups
- Parents involved in the child welfare system provided with access to budgeting and financial planning education as well as parenting education
- Internet based access points such as on Myspace and Facebook
- Faith-based organizations who see parents, relatives and children
- Local shelters and food banks which see families in distress
- Substance abuse and domestic violence crisis intervention teams and efforts
- Full service schools that see the children and the families seeking assistance
- Early intervention programs that target more than the mother – include all of the adults involved in the home and with the family
- Workforce development and employment skills education programs
- Natural community and neighborhood organizations which would be ideal for implementing the Front Porch Project

## ***Discussion of Child Abuse Prevention and Permanency Advisory Council Deliberations***

### *Discussion Related to Tracking and Accountability for Those Served by State Funded Programs:*

- Provide for systematic, objective case reviews to determine the extent to which families coming into the child welfare system might have had this prevented by effective primary or secondary prevention actions. The review should categorize those who might not have entered the system, and those who would not have been affected by prevention actions.
- Track the status and well-being of adopted children into adulthood.
- Study the children and youth served by the various child welfare systems (e.g., DCF child welfare, DJJ CINS/FINS, etc.) in terms of the incidence rates of risk factors and risky behaviors upon becoming adults, and whether there is a difference between those who were adopted and those who aged out of foster care as well as those who entered into care or were served in child welfare and juvenile justice diversion programs. For example, what percentage become homeless, are served in juvenile justice systems, are served in the corrections system, have mental health and substance abuse problems, have founded cases of child abuse, abandonment or neglect with their own children, etc.
- Rework MAPP training classes to better address the needs of adoptive parents.
- Prior to finalizing the adoption provide to the adoptive parents more specific information on child's physical and psychological state along with anticipated future needs that may arise due to trauma exposure.

### *Discussion Related to Educating all of Florida's Children from Pre-Kindergarten to Grade 12:*

- Qualifications, fingerprinting and background screening of staff and employees should be consistent across all systems, whether public, private, or charter schools.
- Utilize Florida's education system to prevent abuse, abandonment and neglect. The Curriculum Frameworks adopted by the Department of Education underscore the importance of conflict resolution and interpersonal problem solving skills at every grade level from kindergarten through the 12<sup>th</sup> grade. Curricula (i.e., Pre-kindergarten, K-3, 4-6, 7-9, and 10-12) should teach skills that would enable children to engage successfully in conflict-resolution, forge nurturing relationships and develop interpersonal problem solving skills.
- Provide relationship skills and parenting education to young children, well before they begin having children.

- Bring agencies (i.e., Office of Adoption and Child Protection, the Department of Education, the Department of Children and Families and the Department of Health) to work together on the enhancement of culturally appropriate (e.g., sensitive, responsive and relevant) curriculum materials to assist instructional personnel in providing instruction through multidisciplinary approach on the identification, intervention and prevention of child abuse, abandonment and neglect.
- Implement strategies (including legislatively supporting this within a workable school day for teachers and their training) to encourage all school districts to utilize the curriculum.
- Provide incentives and initiatives to schools, after-school programs, summer camp and recreation programs to include curricula that teach basic parenting, child development and interpersonal skills at a young age.

*Discussion Related to Educating Florida's Adults:*

- Develop curriculum and materials for use in Florida's schools for parents concerning protective factors, appropriate developmental expectations, positive parenting, positive educational play practices, responding to and redirecting difficult behavior, etc. Adults need an understanding of developmental expectations for all children, birth through grade 12.
- Develop similar materials and courses for use in Florida's correctional facilities to better prepare inmates for their transition back into families and society.

*Discussion Related to State Government:*

- Develop and implement cohesive communication mechanisms and operational strategies between and within state agencies to share information and resources to promote a continuum of integrated and comprehensive services for children, youth and families. Methods could include the adoption of common benchmarks, integration of funding streams, shared data and information, and shared practice protocols and operations.
- Increase the Child Abuse Hotline's (1-800-96-Abuse) and the Parent Helpline's (1-800-FLA-Love) visibility and cooperative sharing of information with Florida's 211 Network for resource and referral.
- Build upon existing infrastructures, such as the screening offered to new mothers in hospitals as opportunities to get good information into the hands of new parents and other adults who will be involved in the lives of these children.
- Adopt a statewide view that prevention of child abuse is a public health issue and that all service systems (e.g., juvenile justice, public health, child welfare, etc.) work together to assist and strengthen families.