

**Child and Family Services Review
Maryland Program Improvement Plan
4th and 5th Quarter Narrative**

Effective March 25, 2006 Maryland completed one year of its PIP implementation plan. Lessons learned during the first year and the training resources and technical support extended by our Region III partners have greatly assisted our steady progress.

During February 2006, two significant meetings occurred for the first time concerning Maryland's PIP. In one meeting, to be responsive to a request for an update on the CFSR PIP, various local and central executive staff and stakeholders participated in a briefing before members of the Maryland Legislature. In the second meeting, clients, stakeholders, public and private representatives participated in portions of a two-day visit from Maryland's Federal Region III representatives and federal central office representatives. The two-day visit was Maryland's first annual PIP meeting with our federal partners. As a result of the feedback from these meetings, the Department was able to identify items in PIP that were suitable for revisions.

We will continue to move forward our plan for statewide improvement in practice consistencies, information system requirements and capabilities, qualitative measures and tools, and access to services. The activities of our Child and Family Services Advisory Committee and PIP Steering Committee will continue to foster better cross-agency assessment and decision-making, based on broad based input that helps to alleviate issues and dissolve barriers to improvement. The members of both committees have the responsibility to keep their colleagues informed of PIP activities. To also assist communication at all levels, Maryland issued the winter 2006 premiere issue of the COMPASS. The COMPASS newsletter is used to communicate Best Practices and to highlight accomplishments within Child Welfare.

A great deal of thanks is extended to our federal partners and resource center consultants for their guidance and support to the executive staff and PIP Subcommittees co-chairs. In this quarter, the Foster Care Court Improvement Project (FCCIP) has also shown that they know what it means to be a true collaborator in the process of improvement. The FCCIP representatives joined SSA at the briefing requested by Maryland State Legislators regarding an update on the Department's CFSR Program Improvement Plan. Members of the QA Subcommittee and Citizen Review Board for Children also supported the Department in this important presentation before the State Legislature.

Due to the diligent work of the five PIP subcommittees, we are able to cite accomplishments in each of the priority areas: Comprehensive Assessment; Court Practices, Quality Assurance; MD CHESSIE; and Access to Services.

COMMITTEE PROGRESS

Comprehensive Assessment/ Family-Centered Practice Committee

Maryland continues its efforts to develop a family-centered practice framework, which includes family engagement, family team meetings, concurrent permanency planning, family involvement of all family members and community involvement. During this quarter, the National Resource Center for Foster Care and Permanency provided literature that will be helpful to defining family-centered practice. The National Resource Center representative, Janyce Fentorn, provided two days of consultation to the Family-Centered Practice workgroup. As part of the review of the literature, the two days were used to identify what we have, where the gaps are and where are the triggers.

Maryland has designed a model of “family centered practice” that incorporates its vision for safe and stable families. This document offers a framework for that practice model that includes national best practice strategies in child welfare, and closes systemic gaps that impede the provision of high quality interventions with children and families. The draft was distributed to local department staff for feedback and comments. Once finalized, Phase I counties will begin to implement the model.

Strategy meetings for Phase I Family-Centered Practice Implementation Sites were initiated during this reporting period. The meetings are to discuss lessons learned and to facilitate a planning and implementation process. The Phase I sites (Baltimore City, Wicomico, Cecil, Anne Arundel, and Calvert Counties) were given priority following responses from all local departments to an agency request for proposals on how to spend funds to support the implementation of family-centered practices.

Concurrent permanency planning is being assisted by work on the early identification of all family members. We learned that the vast majority of local departments use the absent parent locator through child support. An improvement in communication is one area identified to better assist the occurrence of timely requests and timely searches.

For the expansion of support to youth in care, the Maryland Association of Resources for Families and Youth (MARFY) Independent Living Private Providers were provided agency training on the independent living services youth need to transition into adulthood. The roles and responsibilities to ensure comprehensive services, with a focus on staff and youth, was one of the agenda items.

In the interest of increased permanency, we initiated the first of four informal kinship care focus groups. The initial focus group was held in Montgomery County and future focus groups are planned for Anne Arundel and Howard County. The focus group format is a mechanism to identify barriers related to adoption and guardianship as well as what supports kinship caregiver require.

Policy to support family centered practice is continually being reviewed, revised or developed. Local departments were issued the revised policy on worker visits with

children in out-of-home placement. The policy for parent visitation for in-home and out-of-home placements is underway.

Training to support family-centered practice is progressing through our partnership with the University of Maryland School of Social Work Training Department. The Risk-Based training and Safety Assessment for Every-Child Group Residential Provider (SAFE-C GRP) training have been included in the ongoing training offered to local department staff by the University.

Improved legal and court processes

Maryland is fortunate to have the Foster Care Court Improvement Project (FCCIP) as a partner in the State's quest for improved legal and court processes that support and facilitate timely reunification for children. The FCCIP has contributed to our efforts for collaboration between local departments and the judiciary system to address requirements that impact to service delivery.

The FCCIP Implementation Committee has approved the distribution of the standards from the Best Practice Manual addressing the One Judge, One Family initiative, Early Identification and Location of Parents and CINA and TPR Hearing Checklist. The Implementation Committee is the FCCIP oversight committee and is comprised of Judges, Masters, a representative from the Citizen's Review Board, the Director of the Social Services Administration and FCCIP staff. As relayed in previous quarterly reports, these best practices standards are designed to assist courts in the facilitation of improved court practices that are not only integral to the overall outcome of a case, but practices that have made an impact in the courts, either locally or nationally, to effectively meet daily demands.

The Conference of Circuit Court Judges approved the final draft of the FCCIP Continuance/Postponement Policy for CINA and related Termination of Parental Rights matters. The Continuance/Postponement Policy will be a part of the Best Practice Manual, however the policy has already been disseminated to the Circuit Courts for implementation.

The FCCIP distributed the revised Uniform Court Orders reflecting the Adoption and Safe Family Act exceptions language and new State statutory changes to all Maryland Circuit Courts. The orders are also posted on the Judiciary Website at <http://www.courts.state.md.us/family/forms/jo-cinatpr.html>.

The FCCIP has taken other steps in the interest of permanency. The FCCIP will issue a Statewide Notice of Funding Opportunity, seeking to fund initiatives designed to enhance the court's ability to achieve timely permanency in Child In Need of Assistance and Termination of Parental Rights matters. The FCCIP has a legal intern starting 1/11/06 that will begin tracking CINA and TPR Appellate cases to determine what barriers exist in the process. Lastly, the FCCIP began to prepare for the 9th Annual Child Abuse, Neglect and Delinquency Options (C.A.N.D.O) Judicial Conference, the annual statewide training for Juvenile Judges and Masters.

Additionally during this period, the FCCIP continued to conduct Site Visits to the Maryland Circuit Courts.

Design and implement a quality assurance (QA) system

The Department has developed a revised QA process to evaluate the quality of services and to measure the outcomes of children and families. We have piloted a revised QA process in three local departments of social services. The last of three pilot onsite CFSR reviews were completed January 2006. We now have the benefit of lessons learned in each of the pilot on-site reviews conducted in Worcester, Baltimore, and Howard Counties. The feedback from each review has allowed us to make adjustments to our on-site review process and training accordingly.

In March, the Worcester, Baltimore and Howard County draft report were submitted for review and comment to Maryland's Region III representatives and to Maryland's CFSR pilot site consultants (Peter Watson and Deborah Smith) from the National Child Welfare Resource Center.

The Department has also created a Local Supervisory Review process to supplement QA case reviews. The Supervisory review is to increase the capability of supervisors to use a conference to mentor and monitor case activity related to safety, permanency and well-being.

The final draft of the Local Supervisory Review Tool was completed and distributed to pilot sites (Prince George's, Charles and Anne Arundel Counties). This is a compliance instrument for use by local supervisory staff, local child protection panels, and local review boards. The Supervisory Tool has incorporated the monitoring of various items in the new QA case reviews: safe case closure practices; risk-based service planning documents that are complete and in the case record; rate of repeat maltreatment, safe case closure and service plan reviews; caseworker visits with parents for both in-home and out-of-home case requirements; the use and completion of the SAFE-C GRP assessment tool; aftercare service plans; appropriate use of APPLA; documentation in the case record of why siblings are not placed together and the use of emergency shelters. The tool also incorporates a Citizen Review Panel component.

We are working with University of Maryland School of Social Work for the provisions of QA training through an interagency agreement executed March 2006. The agreement includes a two-day CFSR curriculum. Local department directors have been notified to begin submitting the names of staff to attend training. Training is anticipated to begin in late April-early May.

Following the discussion at the Region III Annual PIP Meeting, we anticipate an adjustment to the remaining number of CFSR onsite reviews downward from nine to six jurisdictions (including Baltimore City) during the PIP period. Also raised at the meeting was the need for an automated system to calculate and record QA/CFSR findings. Deborah Smith, Maryland's onsite consultant from the NCR for the Worcester County

pilot site review demonstrated, at the site review, the automated system used by Oklahoma to calculate CFSR findings. A CD copy of the system was provided for Maryland's use. The system was used in the preparation of Maryland's CFSR results.

Improved statewide access to services

Information on licensed placement resources is now available on the DHR intranet. Child Welfare staff can now view listings and have e-mail contact with all DHR licensed treatment foster care programs and all licensed group homes.

DHR worked with other sister agencies to establish a link to the Governor's Office for Children website, where profiles outline the attributes of children that each of the providers will accept for placement. Accessing the GOC website will include profiles from any provider licensed in the state regardless of which agency holds the license.

Planning has continued for a series of meetings with sister state agencies, advocates and foster parents on access issues in education, mental health and substance abuse. The Child and Family Services Committee meeting during this quarter, provided a forum to further define these issues and identify key players to participate in the upcoming meetings. The Access to Education meeting will be held on April 12, 2006 and the Access to Mental Health Services will be held on April 24, 2006.

Consultation occurred this quarter with the National Resource Center on Organizational Development regarding our plan to move forward piloting the Service Array assessment and Resource Development plans. Worcester County has been selected as the pilot site. On September 7, 2006, the NRCOD will host a Service Array Process and Orientation and Work Session which will include all the Eastern Shore counties as well as Baltimore City and Baltimore County. On September 8, 2006, Worcester County will conduct Service Array Assessment.

Priority 5: Evidenced Based Practice

The pilot CHESSIE full release was conducted in Harford County this quarter. The remaining MD CHESSIE roll-out schedule has been adjusted to five (5) Phases after the Harford County Pilot.

The Eastern Shore counties (182 total staff) went "live" on June 5th followed by phase will the southern Maryland counties and Prince George's County (300 total staff) on July 10th.

Subsequent phases will be:

- Western Maryland (351 total staff) on August 7, including Allegany, Garrett, Washington, Frederick, Carroll, and Howard counties
- Central Maryland (718 total staff) on October 2, including Anne Arundel, Montgomery, Cecil, and Baltimore counties
- Baltimore City (1100 total staff) on November 13.