

# DCF LEGISLATIVE TESTIMONY



10/5/2021

## **TESTIMONY OF**

Mike Deines, Senior Director of Public and Governmental Affairs  
Department for Children and Families

## **TESTIMONY ON**

Report on concerns received from the DCF child welfare ombudsman, customer service department, or similar office

**Chair**

Hilderbrand

**Vice Chair**

Concannon

**and**

**Members of the Committee**

## INTRODUCTION

Chair Hilderbrand, vice chair Concannon, members of the committee, it is good to be with you this afternoon. My name is Mike Deines, I manage the Kansas Department for Children and Families public and governmental affairs, which include communications, government affairs and customer service office.

Per the committee's request, I am here today to speak with you specifically about our customer service office or OCS.

## OFFICE OF CUSTOMER SERVICE

DCF currently has a three-person customer service team in our central office comprised of two administrative specialists who answer phones and a manager, who also answers phones and assists us with answering questions from other platforms including social media and what we call non-KORA information requests and requests that come from the governor's constituent services team.

Additionally, our central team works with community relations representatives in each of our six DCF regions to route region specific questions or cases to the appropriate person for resolution.

## CONNECTING WITH CUSTOMER SERVICE

Kansans who have questions or concerns can connect with our customer service team by calling 1-833-765-2003, which is a direct line to our central office customer service team. My team has several options available for how to handle each call. In most cases, the team can answer the question on the spot, especially if it's related to application processes, program information or as in some cases route them directly to the Kansas Protection Report Center to report allegations of abuse or neglect.

The call volume is considerable. During SFY 2021, our three workers answered more than 31,000 calls, including voicemail messages.

### CALL TYPE

<b>EES PROGRAMS: FOOD, CASH, CHILD-CARE ASSISTANCE</b>	17,342
<b>CHILD SUPPORT SERVICES</b>	3,057
<b>PROTECTION &amp; PREVENTION SERVICES/PRC</b>	2,726
<b>KDHE/KANCARE</b>	1,403

Additionally, the agency has a statewide helpline number that clients can use if they have specific questions about their benefit cases for food assistance, child-care assistance and cash assistance. That statewide number, 1-888-369-4777, utilizes Amazon Connect softphone technology, which was stood up at the beginning of the pandemic to accommodate the move to remote work. It provides much more capability to our economic and

employment service workers to receive more inbound calls and to make outbound calls for follow up interviews and other necessary contact with clients.

We also have a chatbot on our public website that can answer general questions about DCF programs and application processes. This is similar to the functionality you see on most e-commerce websites these days. By clicking a button, the user can “chat” with the site to seek needed information. We find this to be useful in reducing the call volume by answering simple questions.

## FOSTER CARE/CHILD PROTECTION CALLS

I wanted to take just a minute to specifically address the protection and prevention services calls we handle. These would include calls seeking information about adoption, foster care and independent living services. They also include those wanting to report suspected abuse or neglect or who have questions or concerns about specific cases.

### PPS CALLS

<b>PRC CALLS</b>	1452
<b>ADOPTION INFORMATION</b>	243
<b>INDEPENDENT LIVING</b>	36
<b>ICPC</b>	14
<b>ADULT PROTECTIVE SERVICES</b>	248
<b>CHILD PROTECTIVE SERVICES</b>	622
<b>FOSTER CARE</b>	111

Most of the calls that are PRC related (reporting abuse or neglect) are routed directly to the KPRC. Other callers seeking information are connected with the appropriate program personnel. For those calls related to a specific case or who want to share concerns, we create a customer service ticket.

### Ticketing

Creating a ticket is reserved for those calls that will need robust investigation and follow-up. The system we use, allows us to create the ticket from a central point and then route it to the correct worker or region. We are then able to track the ticket as information is gathered and the concern is addressed with the client. In most cases, the tickets are handled at the regional/local level since most child welfare cases are handled in the community they occur. The ticket also can be shared with our case management providers who work directly with families.

In SFY 21 we created a total of 2582 tickets. Of those tickets, 95% have been resolved, with approximately 100 that remain open.

We often have concerns and questions come into the agency from other contact points. Calls can be made directly to a worker, our government affairs manager or directly to the Secretary. Unless, questions can be answered immediately, a ticket is created and tracked through OCS. We also receive questions via our Facebook page. My customer service manager is tasked with tracking and answering those questions.

## Partner agencies

Our partner agencies, especially our case management providers (KVC, Saint Francis Ministries, Cornerstones of Care and TFI) have their own customer service processes and often clients will go to them directly for information. Additionally, they notify DCF via a critical incident process when certain criteria are concerned. Criteria include a child injury, near death or death. A critical incident report is also produced when a child stays overnight in an office.

Critical incident cases are routed to the appropriate supervisors and agency leadership for further review and follow-up. Additionally, many critical incident cases are also sent through a triage process in which our prevention and protection services team takes a deeper dive into the case. The information gathered is used to assess trends and to identify any necessary practice improvements to avoid similar issues from arising in future cases.



## OFFICE OF CHILD ADVOCATE

Finally, DCF wants to take this opportunity to reiterate its support for an Office of the Child Advocate (OCA). The primary function of an OCA will be to support children and families that are recipients of child welfare related services from the state by receiving and responding to concerns from the public about those services. We believe the OCA should be responsible for investigating and advocating for case specific citizen concerns as well as monitoring and making recommendations for systems level improvements.

These are important functions that will strengthen existing oversight in the child welfare system and provide more accountability for Kansans that receive child welfare related services. It is essential that citizens receiving services from the state have an independent advocate they can go to for recourse in the event they feel those services were administered incorrectly or inappropriately. This is especially important for child welfare related services provided to the some of the most vulnerable Kansans.

Thank you for this opportunity to speak with you today. I stand for questions at the appropriate time.