

HOUSE FINANCE COMMITTEE  
January 27, 2005  
1:42 p.m.

CALL TO ORDER

Co-Chair Chenault called the House Finance Committee meeting to order at [1:42:23 PM](#).

MEMBERS PRESENT

Representative Mike Chenault, Co-Chair  
Representative Kevin Meyer, Co-Chair  
Representative Bill Stoltze, Vice-Chair  
Representative Mike Hawker  
Representative Jim Holm  
Representative Reggie Joule  
Representative Mike Kelly  
Representative Bruce Weyhrauch

MEMBERS ABSENT

Representative Eric Croft  
Representative Richard Foster  
Representative Carl Moses

ALSO PRESENT

Marcie Kennai, Deputy Director, Office of Children's Services, Department of Health and Social Services, Joel Gilbertson, Commissioner, Department of Health & Social Services; Joanne Gibbens, Program Administrator, Office of Children's Services, Department of Health and Social Services

GENERAL SUBJECT(S):

**OVERVIEW - OFFICE OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES**

The following overview was taken in log note format. Tapes and handouts will be on file with the House Finance Committee through the 24th Legislative Session, contact 465-6814. After the 24th Legislative Session they will be available through the Legislative Library at 465-3808.

<b>TIME</b>	<b>SPEAKER</b>	<b>DISCUSSION</b>
<a href="#">1:42:30 PM</a>	Co-Chair Chenault	Introduced the committee members and Ms. Kennai from the Department of Health and Social Services.
<a href="#">1:43:33 PM</a>	MARCIE KENNAI, DEPUTY DIRECTOR,	Referenced a handout from the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services entitled "Office of Children's

	OFFICE OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES, DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES	Services" (copy on file). She reviewed prevention and well-being services provided, as shown on pages 2 and 3 of the handout.
<a href="#">1:45:46 PM</a>	Ms. Kennai	Identified the clientele of the Office of Children's Services (OCS) in FY04, page 4, and reviewed the Child Protection Program on page 5. She pointed out the components of the Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) and the final report received in September 2002.
<a href="#">1:48:24 PM</a>	Ms. Kennai	Continued to explain the program improvement plan on page 6 and covered the highlights of the program shown on pages 7-9. She emphasized that the maltreatment of children in foster homes needed to be reduced. Areas of improvements needed are in safety, permanency, and wellbeing.
<a href="#">1:51:59 PM</a>	Ms. Kennai	Referenced page 10 and highlighted components of Online Resources for the Children of Alaska (ORCA) as a method to improve accountability and performance.
<a href="#">1:53:38 PM</a>	Ms. Kennai	Shared National Data Indicators for Safety and Permanency (copy on file.) In response to a question from Co-Chair Chenault, provided data for the national standard of incidence of child maltreatment in foster care.
<a href="#">1:55:59 PM</a>	Vice-Chair Stoltze	Asked if there are any problems with the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) regarding achievement of targeted percentages. He asked if the dual system is a factor. Ms. Kennai said that ICWA has not been a barrier. She stated that of the 2000 children in care, 63 percent are Alaska Native. She maintained that working with tribal partners has been a positive experience.
<a href="#">1:58:19 PM</a>	Ms. Kennai	Spoke of the investments made last year by the legislature and their effects on the program, as found on page 13 of the handout. She noted that 26 new positions were added, which helped to implement various plans of service and to respond in a much more timely way to investigate cases, especially high

		priority cases. A vigorous Quality Assurance Program has also been developed, she added.
<a href="#">2:02:40 PM</a>	Ms. Kennai	Continued to explain the results of investment in the system as portrayed on page 14. She spoke of the new resources used to develop an automated case management and financial payments system for OCS.
<a href="#">2:04:21 PM</a>	Representative Joule	Asked if the field workers have a lot of paperwork and if they have any assistance. Ms. Kennai replied that there is a lot of paperwork that goes along with the job, and ORCA will help accommodate that by streamlining the process. She noted that at first ORCA was more work, but now is saving time. She suggested that a workload study be done.
<a href="#">2:07:53 PM</a>	Ms. Kennai	Outlined funding source comparisons for FY03 to FY06. She referred to page 15 and 16 to explain investments in the system such as the Rasmusson Foundation, tribal partnerships, and Casey Family Programs. She pointed out the high proportion of Alaska Native children coming into the system.
<a href="#">2:12:46 PM</a>	Representative Joule	Asked if tribes are involved in the OCS process. Ms. Kennai replied that they are. Representative Joule asked if there is any effect from the attorney general decision. She clarified that there was a recent attorney general decision regarding child investigation, but it does not affect social services.
<a href="#">2:16:31 PM</a>	Ms. Kennai	Elaborated on ongoing challenges to OCS, as found on page 17 of the handout. She reviewed budget requests for 2006 on page 18. She explained the need for 34 new positions, increased funding for training, and licensure fees. She requested funds to pay for foster home recruitment expenses and to expand voluntary post adoption services as well as restore Family Preservation funding.
<a href="#">2:20:16 PM</a>	Representative Holm	Asked if there is a citizens' review panel and who is on it. Ms. Kennai replied that it is made up of citizens who would review policies and procedures, but they could also review cases. She related that town hall meetings are being held to obtain

		citizen input. Representative Holm pointed out that federal requirements require such a panel. He asked if it is currently functioning. Ms. Kennai replied that the panel is just getting started.
<a href="#">2:22:57 PM</a>	Representative Holm	Expressed concern about the incidence of maltreatment in foster care. He asked when the 26 new positions would be hired. Ms. Kennai clarified that all 26 new positions have been hired. Of 321 positions, 18 are currently vacant. In response to a question about the breakdown of the new positions, Ms. Kennai replied that 8 positions are to support ORCA, 12 positions are to address foster parent issues, and 14 are "on the street". Representative Holm commented that it is troubling that so few of the new hires are directly related to reducing high maltreatment numbers, and he wondered if it is a band-aid approach. Ms. Kennai clarified that it is not just about positions, and emphasized that a workload study is needed for a variety of reasons. Ms. Kennai explained the home study process for foster care and proposed that a stricter screening process be used.
<a href="#">2:29:05 PM</a>	Ms. Kennai	Spoke about the need for more support and training for foster care parents. Representative Holm repeated his concern about the treatment of foster care children. He related a story about the existence of children's homes in an earlier era, and suggested that there might be other solutions. He emphasized that the state has a responsibility to assure that these children are not at risk.
<a href="#">2:31:31 PM</a>	Co-Chair Meyer	Referred to the goal to have 24 percent of children adopted in less than 24 months, and pointed out that 81 percent are in the system for 2 years before they are placed. He termed that troubling and asked why it takes so long. Ms. Kennai agreed that this statistic is going in the wrong direction and is troubling. She related that there are a variety of reasons for this; not enough judges to hear all of the cases, not enough

		attorneys to take the cases, too much substance abuse by parents, and emphasized that better training is needed. She reflected that there are also a lot of pieces outside of OCS that are barriers, such as hearings not scheduled in a timely matter and the lack of services.
<a href="#">2:34:09 PM</a>	Co-Chair Meyer	Asked if there is a shortage of parents who want to adopt children. Ms. Kennai referenced Wednesday's Child, a new program. She pointed out that parents want to adopt young, healthy babies, which are not typical foster children clientele. Representative Meyer inquired about improved services from frontline workers, and whether 5-to-1 is the correct ratio of workers to administrators. Ms. Kennai replied that supervisors don't always have time to supervise and more are needed. She clarified that a major retention factor is lack of supervision or poor supervision. Workload is also an issue, she added.
<a href="#">2:39:07 PM</a>	Co-Chair Meyer	Wondered if high turnover rate is a factor in the current 18 vacancies. Ms. Kennai reported that they are not long-term vacancies and are due to retirement or promotion.
<a href="#">2:40:18 PM</a>	Co-Chair Meyer	Inquired if turnover rate in Alaska is higher than in other states. Ms. Kennai replied that turnover rate in Alaska is currently at 20.2 percent, and it varies widely from state to state.
<a href="#">2:41:28 PM</a>	Representative Joule	Wondered if the state is too quick to terminate parental rights. Ms. Kennai responded that sometimes it is too quick and sometimes it is too slow. She acknowledged that there are often not enough services around the state and more training is needed.
<a href="#">2:44:02 PM</a>	Representative Joule	Asked if there is cross-cultural training, given the high rate of Alaska Native. Ms. Kennai acknowledged the need for more training, although there has been some in Juneau recently.
<a href="#">2:45:36 PM</a>	Representative Joule	Suggested that tribes needed to be involved in the adoption process. Ms. Kennai said that tribes are being used as a resource.
<a href="#">2:46:50 PM</a>	Vice-Chair	Asked how many foster parents are

	Stoltze	related to the foster children in their care. Ms. Kennai reported that there are two types of relative homes, licensed foster homes and public assistance homes. As of September 2004, 600 children, or 31 percent, were in a relative's home. She pointed out that almost 59 percent of foster children are released back to their parents.
<a href="#">2:49:15 PM</a>	Representative Weyhrauch	Asked what percent of foster children have fetal alcohol syndrome. Ms. Kennai said she did not know, but that most children are tested and may then be tracked for services.
<a href="#">2:50:59 PM</a>	Co-Chair Chenault	Asked when ORCA was started. Ms. Kennai replied Sept. 7, 2004.
<a href="#">2:51:17 PM</a>	Representative Kelly	Inquired if OCS is doing anything that leans in the direction of recognizing tribal government or sovereignty. Ms. Kennai replied that Barrow and Chevak, the two tribes that have petitioned the federal government for jurisdiction over child welfare cases, have both asked OCS to partner with them in concurrent jurisdiction.
<a href="#">2:54:49 PM</a>	JOANNE GIBBENS, PROGRAM ADMINISTRATOR, OFFICE OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES, DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES	Related that sovereignty is not an area that much thought has been given to. She acknowledged that tribal court jurisdiction could happen, based on a petition by the tribe to the courts. She stated that she did not know how that situation would fit into the big picture. Representative Kelly requested more information.
		<u>ADJOURNMENT</u> The meeting was adjourned at 2:57 PM