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PRESS RELEASE
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
August 17, 2018

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NH DHHS Releases Child and Family Services Review of DCYF Conducted by the U.S. Administration for Children & Families

Concord, NH – The New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) today announced that the U.S. Administration for Children & Families (ACF) has issued the 2018 Child and Family Services Review of the Division for Children, Youth and Families (DCYF). Child and Family Service Reviews (CFSR) are conducted on all states and are intended to help identify strengths and areas needing improvement in their child welfare practices and programs as well as recommend systemic changes that will improve child and family outcomes.

ACF focused its review on 65 DCYF cases from the previous 12 months to understand the experiences and outcomes for children and families involved with DCYF and to make recommendations to strengthen New Hampshire’s child welfare system. The review specifically notes that high caseloads and a greatly diminished array of services for children and families pose significant challenges for DCYF. The CFSR highlights that DCYF staff do good work when they have the time to do so and can direct families to the available programs and services they need. However, high staff caseloads affect quality of work and staff’s ability to meet frequently with children, parents, and foster parents, conduct risk assessments, safety planning and monitoring, complete comprehensive needs assessments, and provide services.

“Transforming our child welfare program has been among the highest priorities of this administration, and it will continue to be,” Governor Christopher T. Sununu said. “The first phase was signing HB400 into law, which created new child protection positions for DCYF. In the second phase, I signed SB590 and 592, which further increased staffing, substantially bringing down caseload levels, and restored preventative and voluntary services that help families before they become involved with DCYF. These initiatives will create a stronger system of care to address many of the concerns raised in the CFSR report. This will help ensure the safety and permanency of children in New Hampshire.”

The CFSR report will inform the next phase of DCYF’s [Child Welfare Systems Transformation](#), as will the recent [DCYF Adequacy and Enhancement Assessment](#), the independent [Quality Assurance Review of DCYF](#), and the 10-Year Mental Health Plan that is in development.

“We share the report’s sense of urgency and believe it provides DCYF and the Legislature with further clarity about the challenges and opportunities within New Hampshire’s child welfare system,” said DHHS Commissioner Jeffrey A. Meyers. “The first and most important step we’ve

taken together with the Governor and the Legislature is to increase staffing at DCYF. But, there is more work to be done. DCYF will be submitting a Program Improvement Plan (PIP) this fall to address caseloads and improve outcomes for children and family involved with the child welfare system. Priorities include workforce development and capacity, the array of services available for children and families, engagement with families, recruitment and retention of foster and adoptive parents, and more specialized training for both DCYF staff and providers.”

The CFSR assesses state performance with regard to substantial conformity with 7 child and family outcomes and 7 systemic factors. The CFSR found that DCYF has a highly functioning quality assurance system and strong community engagement. ACF recommended that DCYF focus its Program Improvement Plan (PIP) on the following key issues: conducting quality initial and ongoing safety and risk assessments; achieving timely permanency for children in foster care; frequent, timely, and quality engagement with parents, especially fathers; and appropriate assessment and service delivery to children and families.

In addition to case reviews, the CFSR included a statewide assessment, DCYF’s analysis of outcomes and systemic factors, as well as interviews and focus groups were conducted with DCYF staff, key stakeholders, judicial members and community partners to assess agency systems functioning.

ACF has informed DCYF that it will hold a public forum in New Hampshire to present the results of the CFSR. The tentative date is September 12th. Specific details, including time and location, will be released when they are available.

The Child and Family Services Review of DCYF can be downloaded at <https://www.dhhs.nh.gov/dcyf/documents/nh-cfsr-2018-report.pdf>.

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