

Child Well-Being Annual report to the board



December 2020



Introduction

Since 2017, the Child Well-Being Advisory Committee has supported an ongoing transformation of county services and supports for children and families, especially within the child protection system.

The context for the committee's beginning is important to understanding the work that's followed. In 2016, the predecessor to the current committee made six major system improvement recommendations to the Hennepin County Board, including the establishment of the Child Well-Being Advisory Committee to guide the implementation of a re-envisioned system.

With guidance and advocacy from the committee, the county has delivered on those initial recommendations. This report highlights key work in Children and Family Services and across the organization. We're seeing results, and we're continuing to build on those improvements together.

Even with our momentum, there is considerable work ahead. We cannot acknowledge recent accomplishments without also acknowledging the persistent disparities in outcomes for kids and families of color. We remain committed to reducing that imbalance. The well-being of Hennepin County kids and families depends on our work.



1.

A new focus on child well-being

We all want children and youth to thrive in safe and stable families. When an immediate intervention is needed, however, we've turned our focus to addressing individualized needs for improved well-being, rather than using a one-size-fits-all approach.

Increasing relative care and reducing shelter placements

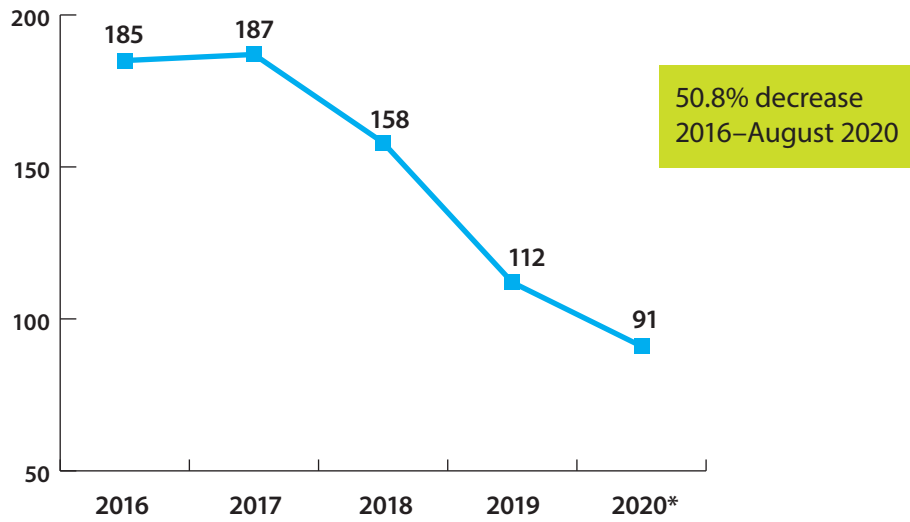
Previously, children and youth who were not safe or stable in their homes were placed in emergency shelter. With a new focus on child well-being, our goal was to reduce the number of children and youth in congregate care, and reduce the amount of time they spent there. An individualized, trauma-informed emergency response maintains children's long-term stability and connections to their communities.

Now, we work to divert children and youth from the shelter system. If possible, children may remain in their own homes — with a safety plan — or may be placed with kin. Other settings include culturally appropriate foster care that's geographically close, or trauma-informed congregate care in the community for children and youth whose needs indicate a different type of setting.

To support this vision, we expanded a pilot project with law enforcement. When police have situations involving children, they now call social workers who assess the circumstances to ensure child safety and prevent unnecessary trauma. Social workers on the rapid response team use their expertise to ask the right questions and make a plan to keep kids safe and with their families whenever possible.

The number of children served in shelter has dropped significantly, a positive change for child and youth well-being. As we've prioritized emergency placement with relatives and in foster homes, Hennepin County's primary congregate shelter concluded operations this year. This reflects years of hard work and partnership. We're strengthening our service and building capacity in our system to serve children in homes, creating less trauma.

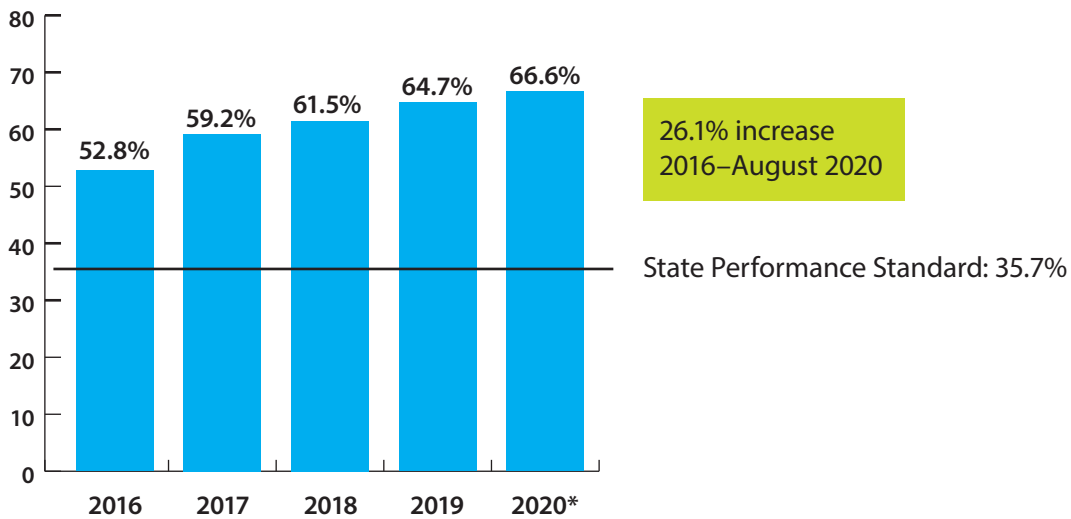
Average monthly count of children/youth in a shelter placement



*Through August 2020.

Relative care

Of all days that children spent in family foster care settings during the given period, what percentage of days were spent with a relative?



*Through August 2020

2. Stabilize the workforce

Investments in staffing have paid off. We've stayed the course with various recruitment, hiring and retention strategies over the past few years, and this has resulted in sustained workforce stability.

Strategies for stability

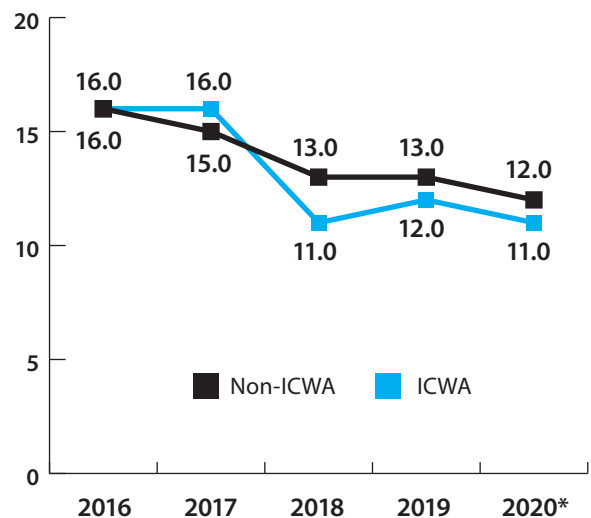
Along with the initial county board investment to support hiring, we changed the qualifications for some roles to expand the pool of qualified workers and attract a workforce with deeper experience working with complex family needs.

In recent years, the increased number of employees has remained constant with continued funding to support them, and workforce turnover has decreased. We've seen the most dramatic change in child protection, but all areas of Children and Family Services have benefited from more staff and less turnover.

Over time, this has also resulted in reduced caseloads for staff, with 10 to 12 cases continuing to be the target caseload size for child protection. As the workforce has grown and stabilized, the distribution of cases has improved, too.

With stability comes opportunity. With the workforce out of crisis, we can invest resources to strengthen practice and grow team capacity.

Child Protection case management median caseloads, 2016–2020



*Through August 2020.

3.

Improve professional supports for staff

We're building shared accountability and mutual ownership into our work with families and each other, and developing a culture of safety and learning.

Intake review teams

Multidisciplinary intake review teams use the KVC Safe & Connected™ Consultation & Information Sharing Framework® to bring structure and shared decision-making to screening discussions. Strong, well-balanced teams engage multiple perspectives to mitigate bias and improve service coordination.

The first two teams launched in 2019. Through August 2020, intake review teams screened over 2,500 child protection reports through this collaborative process.

Group supervision

We've shifted to collaborative and multidisciplinary practices in other ways, too. In group supervision, staff meet regularly with supervisors and colleagues to review cases and discuss themes in their work, with supervisors using the Consultation & Information Sharing Framework® to facilitate the conversation. This process provides space for critical reflection, and sets aside the time to bring careful consideration to key decisions.

Collaborative Safety

We conduct formal reviews of both practice elements and significant incidents using the Collaborative Safety model. With this approach, reviews focus on the context that led to specific actions or decisions. That helps us build a culture of quality improvement and learning. With that in hand, we can focus on improving the system to benefit all.

4.

Offer early and practical help to families

We're getting better at connecting at-risk families to resources upstream with investment in early intervention and prevention programs. For families that do enter the child protection system, we're intentionally surrounding them with support from people they already know.

Parent Support Outreach Program

The Parent Support Outreach Program (PSOP) is a voluntary child welfare program that provides services to at-risk families identified through screened-out child maltreatment reports and community referrals.

To complement services provided by contracted community partners, we expanded PSOP with the county's own operated unit in 2018. Our in-house unit primarily serves families from screened-out child protection reports and investigations, and can also quickly adapt to meet the needs of families in our community—especially those at-risk and most affected by crises. In the last year, that's meant critical support for families affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, civil unrest in Minneapolis, and the Francis Drake Hotel fire.

While PSOP is not a diversion program, we're seeing that early and practical support makes a real difference: in 2019, 94.6% of families served did not have any future maltreatment and 96.6% of children served did not have any future out-of-home placement within 12 months. PSOP is also effectively reaching young children and families of color. Thirty percent of those served in 2019 were children from birth to age 5, and 58.8% of all clients self-identified as Black or African American.

Breaking the cycle

PSOP client Sarah, age 17, grew up in a home with ongoing domestic violence and drug use, leading to child protection involvement throughout her own childhood. She wants to create a different home environment for her 8-month old daughter.

"I never want my baby to go through what I did. Becoming a mom has humbled me. My PSOP social worker said she understood that parenting can be hard, and that she could help me through those times."

With support from PSOP and other community partners, Sarah moved into her own apartment. PSOP helped her replace her vital records, lost after a previous eviction. She's re-enrolled in school, and her daughter is in daycare and connected to health care.

Sarah is working hard to break the cycle of generational child protection involvement.

"Who knows what's in store for me, but from now on, my baby comes first."

Family Group Decision Making

When families do enter the child protection system, we're increasing our use of facilitated family meetings throughout the life of the case to encourage collaboration and center the voices of each family and their circle of support. This active involvement of family and support networks is both practical and meaningful — in 2019, 96% of participants reported they could speak openly during the meeting, and 98% agreed the meeting was useful in helping kids in the family be better off.

With strong, detailed and workable family-driven decisions and planning, children can be safe and avoid out-of-home placement or safely return to their families following placement. When out-of-home placement is necessary, involving family increases the chances that children can be placed with a relative or kin, lessening the trauma of separation from their parents.

We are committed to this best practice that strengthens our work with families. In 2019, we held 50% more facilitated family meetings than the year before. This commitment remains even through the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, as we pivoted to virtual family meetings that have at times allowed for broader family participation.

5.

Continue study and maintain system accountability

The transformation continues. Equipped with data and analysis, we are committed to continuous improvement in our services for and with children and families.

Establishing a data dashboard

The Data and Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) team has continued to build department capacity in tracking and using data to monitor trends and opportunities for improvement.

Importantly, CQI work isn't just about compliance with performance measures, or data for data's sake — it's about improving child well-being, a goal we all share, by employing best practices in service to children and families. We are seeing that CQI is an iterative process that informs our decisions, then helps us evaluate whether those decisions are having the intended impact to improve well-being.

Established in 2018, the child well-being metrics report continues to provide regular updates to the committee on key metrics. To support our most critical work, the report now includes 11 metrics with an emphasis on permanency. Key metrics are also broken down by race and ethnicity, keeping our focus on populations overrepresented in the system as we work to safely reduce disparities.

Hennepin-University Partnership report

We've drawn on our ongoing relationship with the University of Minnesota through the Hennepin-University Partnership Collaborative Grant Initiative to continue robust study of our work throughout the transformation and beyond.

Historically, Hennepin County and Minnesota have struggled to meet state and federal standards for rates of maltreatment re-reporting, recurrence, and foster care reentry. We know improving child well-being means improving these outcomes. To do that — and to better understand the longstanding nature of these challenges — we partnered with researchers at the University of Minnesota's Center for Advanced Study of Child Welfare.

Released in August 2020, the cohort study's findings suggest broad areas for practice and policy improvement, as well as specific intervention areas. The report also recognizes some of the major changes already underway overlap with those discussed in the findings.

Going forward, the Child Well-Being Advisory Committee will discuss the recommendations and advise on next steps and implementation of work.

6.

Establish Child Well-Being Advisory Committee

The final recommendation of the Child Protection Oversight Committee in 2016 was to establish a permanent successor to that group’s work — the Child Well-Being Advisory Committee.

Since 2017, this group of community and child welfare system experts has helped guide and advise county staff, and update the county board on progress toward child safety and well-being outcomes.

Child Well-Being Advisory Committee, 2020

October 2020

Member	Title	Organization	Term Expires
Mike Opat	Commissioner	Hennepin County Board	Board
Debbie Goettel	Commissioner	Hennepin County Board	Board
Medaria Arradondo	Chief of Police	City of Minneapolis	2022
Korina Barry	Director of Outreach, Center for Advanced Studies in Child Welfare	University of Minnesota	2022
Jeanette Boerner	Adult Representation Services Director	Hennepin County	∞
Craig Enevoldsen	Chief of Police	City of Brooklyn Park	2021
Nikki Farago	Assistant Commissioner for Children and Family Services	Minnesota Department of Human Services	∞
Eric Fenner	Managing Director	Casey Family Programs	∞
Anne Gearity	Community and clinical faculty	University of Minnesota	2020
Deirdre A. Golden	Behavioral Health Director	NorthPoint Behavioral Health Services Clinic	2021
Dianne Heins	Attorney	Faegre Drinker	Special appointment through 2024
Gail Korst-Meyer		Foster and shelter parent	2020
Traci LaLiberte	Executive Director, Center for the Advanced Study of Child Welfare	University of Minnesota	2021
Michael Lehan	Principal	Osseo High School	2022
Anne McKeig	Associate Justice	Minnesota Supreme Court	2022
Laurie Ohmann	Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer	Catholic Charities of St. Paul and Minneapolis	2022
David Piper	Judge	4th Judicial District	∞
Mike Scholl	Director	Casey Family Programs	∞

continued on page 11

Child Well-Being Advisory Committee, 2020, *continued*

Alice Swenson	Pediatrician	Children's Minnesota	2020
Darrell Thompson	President	Bolder Options	2020
Lolita Ulloa	Deputy County Attorney	Hennepin County Attorney's Office	∞
Noya Woodrich	Deputy Commissioner, Health Department	City of Minneapolis	2021
Open position			2021

Hennepin County staff

Jodi Wentland	Assistant County Administrator — Human Services	Ex officio
Joan Granger-Kopesky	Director of Children and Family Services	Ex officio
Susan Palchick	Director of Public Health	Ex officio
Ann Ahlstrom	Staff to committee	Hennepin County
Jessica Cintorino	Staff support	Hennepin County
Stacy Rudnick	Data Coordinator	Hennepin County

Settlement subcommittee annual report

In late 2019, a settlement agreement to a federal class action lawsuit naming Hennepin County and the Minnesota Department of Human Services was finalized, concluding the 2017 suit brought regarding child maltreatment and child placement concerns.

While the settlement agreement was possible due to the hard work already underway to transform the system, we remain committed to these efforts. The settlement also includes some additional areas for focused work.

As guided by the settlement, the Child Well-Being Advisory Committee established a settlement subcommittee in 2020 to provide additional advisement for the reforms being implemented. The Settlement Subcommittee makes its own annual report to the board, as follows here.

Annual report of the settlement subcommittee

December 2020

Background

The settlement subcommittee was created as part of the settlement of a class action lawsuit in federal district court in Minnesota. In the lawsuit, T.F., et. al. v. Hennepin County et. al., plaintiffs alleged that the Hennepin County child welfare and child protection system was not doing all it should to protect children. Plaintiffs did not seek monetary damages but rather changes to the operation of Hennepin County's child welfare and protection system. Defendants asserted numerous defenses and denied any liability to plaintiffs.

After numerous mediation sessions, the parties agreed to settle the lawsuit and entered into a settlement agreement that established the settlement subcommittee and its responsibilities, including providing annual reports to the Hennepin County Board of Commissioners. The settlement subcommittee is to be maintained for a period of at least four (4) years to monitor timely compliance by the county with the settlement agreement, including evaluating the results of audits and reviews, and identifying, directing, and/or conducting the reasonable and necessary reviews identified in the settlement agreement, reporting the findings of evaluations and reviews to the Child Well-Being Advisory Committee and providing strategic guidance and recommendations regarding priority issues and concerns for further analysis and improvement by Hennepin County.

Under the terms of the settlement agreement, the settlement subcommittee has some shared responsibilities with the Child Well Being Advisory Committee, its own unique responsibilities and other areas of review and oversight.

This first annual report summarizes the settlement subcommittee's responsibilities, the status of the subcommittee's work during 2020, our major accomplishments this year, and previews work on our agenda for 2021 and beyond.

Settlement subcommittee

The settlement subcommittee has five voting members and one ex-officio non-voting member.

1. Jodi Wentland, Assistant Hennepin County Administrator-Human Services (appointed by Hennepin County)
2. Dan Rogan, Assistant Hennepin County Administrator-Operations (appointed by Hennepin County)
3. Dianne Heins, Counsel, Faegre Drinker law firm (appointed by plaintiffs)
4. Susan Ault, former Senior Director, Casey Family Programs and former Director, Ramsey County Child and Family Services Division (appointed by plaintiffs)
5. John Stanoch, former Hennepin County District Court Judge, appointed as Independent Neutral and Chair of the settlement subcommittee by the court, with the agreement of the parties
6. Eric Fenner, Managing Director, Casey Family Programs (ex-officio, non-voting member)

The settlement subcommittee meets monthly. A more detailed description of the subcommittee's scope of work is found as an attachment to this annual report.

Significant accomplishments of the settlement subcommittee in 2020

- The settlement subcommittee reviewed and monitored the child protection Power BI data dashboard created by Hennepin County. The data dashboard allows the settlement subcommittee and others to monitor the ongoing performance of the Hennepin County child protection system and suggest improvements. The subcommittee also received input from the Data Advocacy team at Casey Family Programs on possible improvements

to the Power BI data dashboard. Hennepin County is reviewing the Casey comments and will report back to the subcommittee. We plan to regularly review the data dashboard on an ongoing basis.

- The settlement subcommittee and Child Well-Being Advisory Committee also began receiving quarterly reports on shelter use, including information on the closure of St. Joseph's Home for Children as Emergency Shelter and Central Intake for Hennepin County and the pivot from a process designed to find an initial shelter placement for some children to instead looking at services needed in the first twenty four hours as the county starts a process of an early evaluation of the needs of families. These quarterly reviews will continue, and the subcommittee will offer recommendations, as needed. The work of the subcommittee with respect to shelter will also be woven into its work with the Wilder Research foster care needs analysis.
- The settlement subcommittee worked with Hennepin County representatives on request for proposals for a third party to conduct a foster care needs analysis, and approved the retention of Wilder Research to conduct this analysis and make recommendations for a plan to address current and projected needs for foster care resources in Hennepin County. The report is due July 1, 2021, and will be reviewed by the settlement subcommittee.
- Hennepin County has provided the settlement subcommittee and Child Well-Being Advisory Committee with information on the development of case plan protocols and practice standards regarding case plans and services. The case plan standards and protocols are on target to be in place on January 1, 2021, and we plan to monitor the implementation of the protocols and standards on an ongoing basis.
- In 2020 the settlement subcommittee began regular reviews of monthly screen out/track assignment audits by the Minnesota Department of Human Services on Hennepin County decisions to screen out maltreatment reports and track assignments for maltreatment reports screened in. These reviews are ongoing.
- The settlement agreement allows the settlement subcommittee to direct Hennepin County to gather data and records for review and analysis or to conduct reviews, analysis, or audits, not otherwise required by the settlement agreement, relating

to any priority concerns or issues regarding the Hennepin County child welfare and protection system, up to 600 hours per year. Based on a review of the data dashboard and other information provided by Hennepin County, the settlement subcommittee unanimously determined to utilize the 600 hours of additional research in 2020 to conduct further analysis relating to permanency. This work is discussed in more detail in the section below relating to the 2021 work plan.

- The settlement subcommittee worked closely with Hennepin County staff to suggest proposed MNIT Social Service Information Services (SSIS) changes. The proposed changes will allow Hennepin County to more effectively monitor best practices that children are to be interviewed outside the presence of an alleged perpetrator or foster parent, absent SSIS documented “exceptional circumstances.” Once the SSIS changes are in place, the settlement subcommittee will monitor the use of “exceptional circumstances” on an ongoing basis.
- The settlement also provides that Hennepin County shall work to ensure that potential adoptive parents receive all information about a child before pre-adoptive placement and are able to meet the child’s needs; similarly, Hennepin County will also provide information to foster parents about a child’s needs and a showing has been made that the foster parents can meet those needs. Hennepin County has presented information currently provided to potential adoptive parents and foster parents and plans to improve the information provided, and this discussion is ongoing and will continue into 2021.
- The settlement subcommittee received the first biannual report of the Hennepin County review team relating to children under guardianship or in placement more than 24 months with no permanency determination. Hennepin County briefed the settlement subcommittee on current data available and work in progress to better identify barriers in future reports. The subcommittee plans to dive deeper into this topic in 2021.
- Hennepin County also implemented a multi-disciplinary team screening approach and implemented county attorney consultation on maltreatment re-reports where parents are not participating in services, and then briefed the settlement subcommittee on both topics. Hennepin

County will continue to inform the settlement subcommittee on the multi-disciplinary team screening work in 2021.

2021 work plan

During its first year of work, the settlement subcommittee set a regular monthly meeting, developed a robust work plan for the year that tracked the requirements of the settlement agreement and received background information and reports that will guide our further analysis and recommendations in 2021 and beyond. Our discussions have been candid and collegial. In addition to our ongoing reviews and discussions discussed above, these are areas where we also plan to devote additional focus in 2021:

Permanency

Review of data dashboard information and supplemental information provided by Hennepin County establishes that while the total number of children in out of home placement has declined since 2017, the average median days of children in out-of-home placement has more than doubled since 2015 from 214 days to 457 days in 2020.

Hennepin County’s demographic of children who are in out-of-home placement reflects that the majority of children are young and are children of color. Most children who are placed in out-of-home care in Hennepin County have a permanency plan with family.

Children who are state wards in Hennepin County are referenced as legacy children. A majority of Hennepin county’s legacy children are ages 11 years old or younger and most are children of color. Hennepin County legacy children are in out-of-home placement for longer periods of time.

Hennepin County’s overall performance in achieving timely permanency for children has declined from the period of 2013 to 2020. Children of color have experienced the greatest decline in meeting permanency timelines (Black/African American, Indian, Hispanic). Additionally, younger children ages 0–5 have the lowest performance in meeting permanency within 12 months or less.

The settlement subcommittee believes it is essential to develop a better understanding of the reasons

for these outcomes and develop recommendations to address improved outcomes. The settlement subcommittee will be working with Hennepin County in 2021 to advance these discussions and change these trajectories. In conjunction with this work, the settlement subcommittee will also work with Hennepin County to develop a deeper understanding of barriers with relation to children under guardianship or in placement more than 24 months with no permanency determination.

DHS audit

Along with the Child Well Being Advisory Committee, the settlement subcommittee will review the Hennepin County Continuous Improvement Team annual evaluation of any Minnesota Department of Human Services findings and any resulting conclusions and recommendations.

Re-envisioning shelter care

The settlement subcommittee and Child Well-Being Advisory Committee will work with Hennepin County to identify priority concerns and offer guidance for re-visioning shelter care in Hennepin County and to develop, establish and implement protocols and practice standards.

Trial home visit protocol and practice standards

The settlement subcommittee and Child Well-Being Advisory Committee will work with Hennepin County to develop, establish, and implement protocols and practice standards regarding trial home visits.

COVID-19

The first reported case of COVID-19 in Hennepin County was reported on March 12, the day of our monthly settlement subcommittee meeting. The subcommittee has not met in person since then, but we have maintained our monthly meeting schedule.

During each of our meetings, the subcommittee receives information from Hennepin County relating to challenges to the child protection system stemming from this global pandemic. We have discussed challenges to in-person visitation, alternatives for visitation, adequacy of personal protection equipment for child protection workers, safe environments for visits, the impact on court hearings, impact on county service delivery partners, challenges with

drug and other testing and services, impediments to compliance with case plans and associated issues with reunification and much more. These challenges were exacerbated during the civil unrest following the death of George Floyd.

We have also benefited from updates from Eric Fenner of Casey Family Programs, who has been able to share with the subcommittee challenges faced by child protection systems across the country and the observation that Hennepin County is doing a good job of keeping its child protection system on track and moving forward during this difficult time.

Respectfully submitted,
John M. Stanoch

Chair and Independent Neutral,
Settlement Subcommittee

On behalf of the settlement subcommittee

Settlement subcommittee annual report — scope of work

Shared responsibilities with Child Well-Being Advisory Committee

- Quarterly shelter use report and recommendations. Receive quarterly reports from Hennepin County regarding trends in shelter use and provide recommendations for potential improvements in policies and procedures relating to the use of shelter care. (Ongoing)
- Implement case plan protocol and practice standards. Work with Hennepin County to develop, establish and implement protocols and practice standards regarding case plans and services. (Due 1/1/21)
- Audit report. Review Hennepin County Continuous Improvement Team annual evaluation of any DHS audit findings and any resulting conclusions and recommendations. (First review due 1/1/21)
- Re-envisioning shelter care. Work with Hennepin County to identify priority concerns and offer guidance for re-visioning shelter care in Hennepin County and to develop, establish and implement protocols and practice standards. (Due 7/1/21)

- Implement trial home visit protocol and practice standards. Work with Hennepin County to develop, establish and implement protocols and practice standards regarding trial home visits. (Due 7/1/21)

Unique responsibilities of settlement subcommittee

- Data dashboard. Track and review data on the Hennepin County Child and Family Services Programs Power BI dashboard created by Hennepin County. (Ongoing)
- Screen-out/track assignment audit. Review DHS monthly audits of Hennepin County decisions to screen-out maltreatment reports and track assignments for maltreatment reports screened-in. (Ongoing)
- Foster care needs analysis 3rd party contract. Commission a foster care needs analysis and plan to address current and projected needs for foster care resources. (Wilder Research retained, report due 7/1/21)
- State ward audit. Review annual DHS state ward review audits where no adoptive resource has been identified within 24 months after the child was placed by court order under the guardianship of the commissioner. (First audit results due 1/1/21)
- Additional work. Direct Hennepin County to gather data and records for review and analysis or to conduct reviews, analysis, or audits, not otherwise required by the settlement, relating to any priority concerns or issues regarding the Hennepin County child welfare and child protection system, up to 600 hours per year. Year one review and analysis relating to permanency. (In progress—2020 hours dedicated to additional data collection regarding permanency-ongoing)

Other areas of settlement subcommittee review and oversight

- Implement child interview outside presence of alleged perpetrator, including a parent, during investigation. Review Hennepin County request that MNIT make Social Service Information Service (SSIS) changes to monitor compliance with best practice requirements unless exceptional, documented circumstances establish it would not be in the child's best interest to do so. (Changes requested-in progress)
- Implement caseworker monthly visits with foster child outside the presence of the foster parent. Review Hennepin County request that MNIT make SSIS changes to monitor compliance with best practice requirements unless exceptional, documented circumstances establish it would not be in the child's best interest to do so. (Changes requested-in progress)
- Implement a review team for children under guardianship or in placement more than 24 months with no permanency determination. Review report of Hennepin County review team. (First biannual report received-ongoing)
- Implement referral of children under guardianship for more than 12 months with no identified permanency resource to Minnesota Public-Private Adoption Initiative for recruitment of adoptive resource.
- Implement multi-disciplinary team screening approach for maltreatment reports received by Hennepin County. Team screening approach implemented by Hennepin County. (Ongoing)
- Implement county attorney consultation on maltreatment re-reports where parents are not participating in services. County attorney consultation implemented. (Ongoing)
- Implement potential adoptive parents receiving all information about child before pre-adoptive placement and a showing has been made that they can meet the child's needs; and implement foster parent receiving information about a child's needs prior to placement and a showing has been made that the foster parents can meet the child's needs. Hennepin County reviewing information provided. (Ongoing)



Hennepin County

Human Services

300 South 6th Street, Minneapolis 55487

hennepin.us