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Baker-Polito Administration Announces Progress on DCF Reforms in Recognition of Social Worker Month

BOSTON – The Baker-Polito Administration and union officials announced today that a significant number of the reforms recommended last fall to overhaul the Department of Children and Families (DCF) are complete. In the last six months, there has been an intensive effort underway to restructure DCF with the primary goal of keeping children safe. The administration was joined by members of SEIU Local 509 to discuss updates and pledge to move forward to implement policy improvements, hire and train staff and focus on the challenges that lie ahead.

The department now has five major new policies developed in partnership with the union, including putting all at-risk kids on the same investigation track, and the first ever medical director who started in January. Both Criminal Offender Record Information (CORI) and Sexual Offender Record Information (SORI) checks are now required on all relevant persons in a household, DCF workers review 911 call history and response to a home, new case screening teams are in place in all offices and there is a new Central Massachusetts Regional Office up and running.

There has also been targeted outreach to recruit and hire frontline staff, with a record of new hires resulting in a net increase of 170 full-time employees (FTEs) since the start of Fiscal Year (FY) 2016. The foster care application backlog has been reduced, training has been rolled out and DCF's IT system has been upgraded to allow for more advanced capabilities.

During a media availability at the State House, the administration explained these reforms and highlighted the ongoing collaboration and partnership with leadership of SEIU Local 509 that has made such progress possible in a short amount of time.

“Last fall we pledged, with union leadership, to better support our social workers who are on the front lines every day and reform a broken system of policies,” **said Governor Baker**. “Today, while we still have more work to do to improve how the Commonwealth cares for the most vulnerable children, the Department of Children and Families is making robust strides in their mission to keep kids safe. My administration will continue to invest in frontline workers and continue to reform this critical department.”

To demonstrate an ongoing commitment to the Department, the Baker-Polito Administration has budgeted \$938.2 million to DCF for Fiscal Year (FY) 2017, a \$30.5 million increase above the FY 2016 budget, and has maintained an open dialogue with the union to address their concerns.

“While these new reforms improve the lines of communication among social workers, supervisors and managers, reducing the stress on social workers is a priority and we are accelerating efforts to recruit the next wave of social workers to reduce caseloads and protect children,” **said Secretary of Health and Human Services Marylou Sudders**. “We now have a solid foundation that the Department can build off of going forward.”

The Department and union have moved swiftly to hire and train more social workers, social work supervisors, medical social workers, managers, clerical staff and attorneys. Since September, 332 positions have been posted and 201 staff have started or will start in the next few weeks.

“We are appreciative of the positive working relationships we have maintained with union officials throughout this process. Most of all, we are grateful to our workers for their efforts to accept and move forward with reforms,” **said DCF Commissioner Linda Spears**. “Our agency is more equipped than we have ever been to protect those who need us most – children. I thank our staff today and every day for your tremendous work.”

“The policy reforms announced today are more than three decades in the making, and critical to the work we do,” **said Peter MacKinnon, a veteran child protection worker and president of the union chapter representing DCF’s 2,900 social workers and investigators**. “Now our attention must turn fully to addressing the caseload

crisis and attrition rates that loom over our efforts to keep at-risk children safe throughout the Commonwealth."

Progress Over The Last 6 Months for DCF in Partnership with SEIU Local 509:

- Overhauled the Department's intake policy, putting all screened-in reports of abuse and neglect (51A) on one investigation track instead of two.
 - o Requires Criminal Offender Record Information (CORI), Sexual Offender Record Information (SORI), and national criminal history database checks for parents, caregivers and all household members over 15 years old. This is for 100 percent of cases.
 - o Workers now request 911 call history and police response to the residence of any child or family involved in a report of abuse or neglect. The Department is now working with law enforcement.
 - o All screened-in reports – those that require investigations to be opened – are assigned to an Investigation Trained Response Worker.
 - o The revised policy puts decision-making at the appropriate level of intervention.
 - o For the first time, this policy enables Response Workers to search online sources of information to assess child safety.
 - o Mandates use of the Department's Risk Assessment Tool to better identify and assess potential future risks to the child's safety.
- Created the first Supervisor Policy in DCF history to provide training, supervision and review of all complex cases.
- Trained over 1,700 staff and implemented the Department's new protective intake and supervision policies.
- Negotiated three additional policies that will be implemented later this year: The Family Assessment and Action Planning Policy reinforcing the requirement for family assessment and action planning which will be updated every six months; In-Home Case Practice Policy to ensure regular visits to the child; and the Case Closing Policy, which lays out the process and criteria for closing a case. Training for the newest policies is in development and will begin in late spring and early summer.

Staff Recruitment and Retention:

- Increased the number of licensed social workers to 91% compared to 54% in October 2014.
- With SEIU Local 509, convened a work group to develop social worker retention strategies, which has been meeting regularly.
- Since the start of the FY 2016, the Department has had a NET increase of 170 Full Time Employees (FTEs).
- 332 positions have been posted for social workers, social work supervisors, medical social workers, managers, clerical staff and attorneys.

Other Completed Reforms:

- In January, DCF reestablished the Central Massachusetts Regional Office, allowing for greater oversight and managerial capacity. This moved the Department closer to a manager-to-supervisor ratio of 4:1.
- Reduced 75 percent of backlog for Foster Home Applications. The Department will be working to increase the number of foster homes.
- Closed 680 fair hearing cases in the months of December, January and February with the support of two newly hired hearing officers and nine newly hired paralegals.
- Hired the Department's first ever full-time Medical Director, Dr. Linda Sagor, to provide oversight of the medical needs of children in foster care; to ensure DCF meets its requirements for 7- and 30-day initial medical screens; and to offer expert consultation on medically complex cases.
- Planned IT modifications to incorporate new policies into the FamilyNet System.
- Launched a significant technology upgrade to support changes in the new supervision policy and protective intake policy that include the ability to track substance misuse in families.

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