



## DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES ADVISORY COMMITTEES ASSESSMENT

December 2008

Report No. 08-S09

### *Scope*

The Florida Government Accountability Act directs OPPAGA to review state agencies and their advisory committees, examine their costs, and evaluate their operations.<sup>1</sup> As part of our review, we examined the advisory committees of the Department of Children and Families to assess their purposes, activities, related costs, and need for continuation. Our review addressed the following questions for each advisory committee to determine its purpose, effectiveness, and public accessibility.<sup>2</sup>

- Why was the advisory committee created and has it fulfilled its specific purpose?
- Does the advisory committee's advice and support significantly contribute to the agency's mission?
- Are advisory committee members representative of the public and stakeholders affected by its actions and can the public readily access advisory committee proceedings, materials, and products?

### *Background*

The Department of Children and Families mission is to protect the vulnerable, promote strong and economically self-sufficient families, and advance personal and family recovery and resiliency. The department is responsible for administering the state's major human services programs, including

Economic Self-Sufficiency, Family Safety (Adult Services, Child Care Regulation, Child Protection and Permanency, and the Florida Abuse Hotline), Mental Health, Refugees, and Substance Abuse. These programs are administered by staff at the department's central office, six regions, and 20 circuits. For some of these programs, the bulk of services are provided through department contracts with private providers.

The department has nine advisory committees, four established by statute, three in accordance with federal rules or grant requirements, and two by managerial initiative.<sup>3</sup> Collectively, these committees incurred travel, staff, and other expenses totaling \$413,624 in Fiscal Year 2007-08 (see Exhibit 1). However, two of the committees—the Refugee Services Task Force and the Florida State Mental Health Planning Council—were 100% federally funded. As a result, state expenses for the advisory councils were \$339,067. The Florida Substance Abuse and Mental Health Corporation accounted for 83% of this total in Fiscal Year 2007-08.

<sup>1</sup> Sections 11.901-11.920, *F.S.*

<sup>2</sup> Our review included advisory committees that the department was directed to include in its Agency Report to the Sunset Committee. These included committees established in statute or by managerial initiative and defined in ss. 20.03 (3), (7), (8), (9), (10), and (12), *F.S.*

<sup>3</sup> The department listed 11 advisory committees in its Agency Report to the Sunset Committee. We did not assess four of the committees for the following reasons: the Access to Recovery Advisory Board because it ended in January 2008 along with the federal grant to which it related; One Church One Child of Florida, Inc., because it did not meet the statutory definition of an advisory committee; the Task Force on Children's Justice because the department made it a subcommittee of the Task Force on Child Protection in March 2008; and the Florida Substance Abuse Prevention Advisory Council because it was transferred to the Governor's Office of Drug Control in late 2007 at the request of that office. We assessed two additional advisory committees, the Advisory Panel on Adult Protective Services and the Task Force on Child Protection, because department management created these committees during Fiscal Year 2007-08.

**Exhibit 1**

**The Department of Children and Families Reported \$339,067 in State Advisory Committee Costs in Fiscal Year 2007-08**

State Funded Advisory Committees	Reported Cost
Florida Substance Abuse and Mental Health Corporation	\$ 282,297
Council on Homelessness	17,060
Task Force on Child Protection <sup>1</sup>	16,003
Independent Living Services Advisory Council	13,858
Advisory Panel on Adult Protective Services	9,849
Screening, Brief Intervention, Referral and Treatment (SBRIT) Steering Committee	0
Behavioral Health Services Integration Workgroup	0
<b>Subtotal state costs</b>	<b>\$339,067</b>
100% Federally Funded Advisory Committees	
Florida State Mental Health Planning Council	49,397
Refugee Services Task Forces	25,160
<b>Subtotal federal costs</b>	<b>\$74,557</b>
<b>Total costs</b>	<b>\$ 413,624</b>

<sup>1</sup> Funding for the Task Force on Child Protection in Fiscal Year 2007-08 was provided through a combination of state and federal funds. For Fiscal Year 2008-09, the Task Force on Child Protection will be funded through the federal Children’s Justice Act Grant.

Source: Department of Children and Families.

*Assessment and Recommendations*

In assessing department advisory committees, we considered criteria including the intended purpose of each committee, and if it had fulfilled that purpose, if it is effective in contributing to the department’s mission, if committee members are representative of the public and stakeholders affected by its actions, and public accessibility to the committee.

We concluded that all but one of the department’s advisory committees continue to serve a public purpose by providing opportunities for stakeholder input or expertise. The committees’ activities are consistent with legislative or federal intent or department directive. The committees provide advice to the department if intended to do so, and are related to the department’s mission of protecting the vulnerable, promoting strong and economically self-sufficient families, and advancing personal and family recovery and resiliency.

However, we concluded that one committee, the Behavioral Health Services Integration Workgroup,

could be abolished without adversely affecting the department’s ability to achieve its mission or the health, safety, or welfare of Florida’s citizens. We also concluded that three committees should be continued with modifications to improve their accountability to the Legislature and the public. The Florida Substance Abuse and Mental Health Corporation should annually provide a written report on its progress in achieving its goals, enhance its website to serve as a clearinghouse of information on substance abuse and mental health services in Florida, and make additional efforts to work more closely with the Departments of Education and Health. The Independent Living Services Advisory Council should create a website to inform the public and council members about its current and past activities and make public announcements of its meetings. Finally, each of the seven regional Refugee Services Task Forces should create a website that provides general information and meeting times and minutes.

Based on our assessment of the department’s nine advisory committees, we recommend that the Legislature continue five committees, continue three with modifications, and abolish one committee. Specifically, we recommend that the Legislature

***Continue***

- Advisory Panel on Adult Protective Services
- Council on Homelessness
- Florida State Mental Health Planning Council
- Screening, Brief Intervention, Referral and Treatment Steering Committee
- Task Force on Child Protection

***Continue with Modifications***

- Florida Substance Abuse and Mental Health Corporation
- Independent Living Service Advisory Council
- Refugee Services Task Forces

***Abolish***

- Behavioral Health Services Integration Workgroup

For more detailed information on our assessment and recommendations, please see Exhibit 2.

## Exhibit 2

### The Department of Children and Families Had Nine Advisory Committees in Fiscal Year 2007-08

#### Advisory Panel on Adult Protective Services

Fiscal Year 2007-08 ▪ Cost: \$9,849 ▪ Authorization: Managerial Initiative in 2007

**Purpose.** The department created the advisory panel to provide counsel and advice on the provision of services to Florida's vulnerable adult and elder populations. The panel is to improve communication among state agencies serving vulnerable adults and elders and identify potential statutory, policy, or procedural barriers prohibiting effective services for clients. The panel provides advice and recommendations through an annual report to the department and by conducting quarterly meetings during which panel members analyze current statutes and develop recommendations to improve services to vulnerable adults and the elderly. The advisory panel continues to fulfill a public purpose by helping the department improve services for vulnerable adults and the elderly.

**Effectiveness.** The department has used input from the panel in several ways. For example, the panel worked with the department to develop and conduct a satisfaction survey of the judiciary, law enforcement, and community partners. The department is planning to use the survey results and the advisory panel's annual report to improve training and communication to strengthen and better integrate adult protective services in Florida. The panel also has worked with department staff to revise the Adult Protective Services Program's operating procedures regarding the capacity to consent to protective services.

**Public Access.** The advisory panel is composed of 17 members that include persons with experience relevant to adult protection, such as consumer advocates, judges, attorneys, law professors, state agency leadership, and law enforcement. The panel met five times during Fiscal Year 2007-08 and twice so far in Fiscal Year 2008-09. Panel meetings are open to the public and the panel's website provides information on meeting dates and locations and meeting materials and minutes. The panel also provides meeting announcements through the *Florida Administrative Weekly*.

**Assessment.** The advisory panel continues to fulfill a public purpose by providing advice and recommendations to the department to improve services for vulnerable adults and the elderly. The department has used input from the committee to revise procedures and improve program training and communication. The panel is accessible to the public and its members reflect the stakeholders affected by its actions.

**Recommendation.** Continue the Advisory Panel for Adult Protective Services.

#### Behavioral Health Services Integration Workgroup

Fiscal Year 2007-08 ▪ Cost: \$0 ▪ Authorization: Statutory, created in 2001, s. 394.9083, *Florida Statutes*

**Purpose.** The workgroup was created to assess barriers to the effective and efficient integration of mental health and substance abuse treatment services across various systems, propose solutions to these barriers, and ensure that plans for mental health and substance abuse treatment services required by statute consider these solutions. The workgroup no longer serves a public purpose because it has ceased to function and the Florida Substance Abuse and Mental Health Corporation provides a similar service to the state.

**Effectiveness.** The department reports that the workgroup completed its duties and disbanded in 2003.

**Public Access.** The workgroup no longer meets.

**Assessment.** The workgroup no longer fulfills a public purpose and has already disbanded. The Florida Substance Abuse and Mental Health Corporation provides a similar service to the state.

**Recommendation.** Abolish the Behavioral Health Services Workgroup by repealing s. 394.9083, *Florida Statutes*.

## Council on Homelessness

Fiscal Year 2007-08 ▪ Cost: \$17,060 ▪ Authorization: Statutory, created in 2001, s. 420.622(2), *Florida Statutes*

**Purpose.** The council was created to develop policy, advise the state Office of Homelessness, and submit an annual report with recommendations to reduce homelessness in Florida. It is also intended to coordinate state, local, and private agencies and providers in consolidating programs and producing a statewide financial plan to ensure vulnerable persons attain economic self-sufficiency and secure safe and stable housing. The council continues to fulfill a public purpose by providing advice and recommendations to the department, developing policies to reduce Florida's homeless population, identifying barriers that prevent the homeless from receiving services, and promoting coordination among the various entities that provide services to the homeless.

**Effectiveness.** The department, advocates, and local homeless coalitions have used council advice and recommendations to improve service delivery to the homeless. For example, the council assisted the department in changing the grant application instructions for the state's Challenge grants and Homeless Housing Assistance grants. The council has also worked with advocates to address affordable housing, as well as with the state's advisory council on youth aging out of foster care. Since 2004, local homeless coalitions have used survey tools the council developed so that counts of the homeless population would be more consistent. The council and other stakeholders also made recommendations on federal homeless grants for the 2008 Congressional reauthorization of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act that were subsequently included in the reauthorization bill, such as revising the definition of a homeless person to include individuals sharing the housing of others due to economic crisis. In addition, the department attributes council efforts to a 45% increase in the number of beds for the homeless since 2002.

**Public Access.** The council includes members representing stakeholders, including 15 members prescribed by state law: seven state agency heads or designees, four statewide organizations, and four appointees of the Governor. The council met five times during Fiscal Year 2007-08 and twice so far in Fiscal Year 2008-09. The council's website provides general information about the council along with meeting dates and locations, meeting materials, and other relevant publications. The council also provides meeting announcements through the *Florida Administrative Weekly*.

**Assessment.** The council continues to fulfill a public purpose by providing advice and recommendations to the department, developing policies to reduce Florida's homeless population, identifying barriers that prevent the homeless from receiving services, and promoting coordination among the various entities that provide services to the homeless. The department, advocates, and local homeless coalitions have used advice and recommendations from the advisory council to improve service delivery to the homeless. The council is accessible to the public and its members reflect the stakeholders affected by its actions.

**Recommendation.** Continue the Council on Homelessness.

## Florida State Mental Health Planning Council

Fiscal Year 2007-08 ▪ Cost: \$49,397 ▪ Authorization: Federal Law, created in 1993 in accordance with Title V of the Public Health Services Act 42 U.S.C.

**Purpose.** The planning council was created to review, monitor, and evaluate the community-based system of mental health care, advocate for persons with serious mental illnesses and youth with serious emotional disturbances, and submit a letter of support to the Federal Grant authority and the Governor on the department's block grant application and annual implementation report for federal block grant funds. The state is required to have a state mental health planning council to continue to receive funds from the Federal Community Mental Health Services Block Grant. The council assists the department in complying with requirements for the block grant by reviewing the department's block grant application annual implementation report and submitting a letter of support with information on the status of the state's mental health plan. The council continues to fulfill a public purpose by assisting the department in completing the federal grant application each year, providing a forum for stakeholders to voice their concerns, and ensuring that the department receives public input on supports and services available statewide.

**Effectiveness.** The department has used advice and support from the council to complete the block grant application each year and obtain public input about mental health services through council meetings. These meetings also provide department central office managers with insight into actions taken by department circuits and regions to improve mental health services. In 2007, the council participated in a strategic planning process and adopted goals for implementation. The council reports that it has made progress in achieving its goals by establishing working relationships with the Department of Education's Division of Vocational Rehabilitation and the Florida Housing Finance Corporation, partnering with the statewide organization Partners in Crisis to address decriminalization and jail diversion, writing letters to the Agency for Health Care Administration to advocate for open access to medications, and conducting fact finding investigations for critical areas of the state mental health system.

**Public Access.** The council includes 35 members that represent stakeholders such as consumers, survivors, former patients, family members of adults or children with serious mental illnesses or emotional disturbances, providers, advocacy groups, and state agency representatives. The council met four times during Fiscal Year 2007-08, and once so far in Fiscal Year 2008-09, with three more meetings scheduled for the fiscal year. The council's website provides general information about the council along with meeting dates and locations, meeting materials, and block grant information. At the meetings, the council allows families and adult consumers to voice their concerns, learn about the services and supports that are available, and provide input regarding the block grant application.



## Florida State Mental Health Planning Council (continued)

**Assessment.** The State Mental Health Planning Council continues to fulfill a public purpose by helping the department complete the federal grant application each year, providing a forum for stakeholders to voice their concerns, and ensuring that the department receives public input on services available throughout the state. The department has used advice and support from the council to ensure compliance with federal funding requirements and the council works to strengthen the state's mental health services system. The council provides public access through its website, which provides information on meeting times and minutes, and other relevant information.

**Recommendation.** Continue the State Mental Health Planning Council.

## Florida Substance Abuse and Mental Health Corporation

Fiscal Year 2007-08 ■ Cost: \$ 282,297 ■ Authorization: Statutory, created in 2003, s. 394.655, *Florida Statutes*

**Purpose.** The Florida Substance Abuse and Mental Health Corporation's statutory charge is to identify systemic and specific needs for substance abuse and mental health services, facilitate improved coordination among state agencies that provide substance abuse and mental health services, and identify impediments to implementing effective services. The corporation issues an annual report that makes recommendations to the Governor and the Legislature on policies to improve coordination and effectiveness of the state's mental health and substance abuse system. The corporation's board holds quarterly meetings to discuss its progress, work on initiatives, and obtain public input. In 2007, the Legislature also gave the corporation responsibility for developing criteria and reviewing proposals to award Criminal Justice, Mental Health and Substance Abuse Reinvestment Act grants. These grants are awarded to counties to address the growing population of persons with substance abuse, mental illness, and co-occurring disorders in local jails and state prisons. The corporation continues to fulfill a public purpose by providing advice and recommendations to the Governor, Legislature, and state agencies that address the need for substance abuse and mental health services and promoting coordination among these agencies.

**Effectiveness.** The corporation has made progress achieving its statutory objectives. For example, it worked with stakeholders to advocate for suspending rather than terminating entitlement benefits such as Medicaid during periods of incarceration so that individuals with mental illness can successfully reintegrate back into the community upon release. The 2008 Legislature adopted this initiative into law through Ch. 2008-217, *Laws of Florida*. The corporation worked with the Department of Children and Families and the Department of Corrections to implement an interagency agreement to ensure individuals with severe and persistent mental illness incarcerated in state correctional institutions have access to mental health services upon their release. The corporation also worked with other stakeholders to propose legislation for the Criminal Justice, Mental Health, and Substance Abuse Reinvestment Act grants, which the Legislature enacted in Ch. 2007-200, *Laws of Florida*. The corporation's executive director promotes interagency coordination through weekly conference calls with state agencies that provide substance abuse and mental health services, including the Departments of Children and Families, Corrections, Elder Affairs, and Juvenile Justice, and the Agency for Health Care Administration. However, corporation staff reports that it needs to put more effort into establishing contacts and interacting with the Departments of Education and Health, which also have a role in the state's substance abuse and mental health service system. Also, although the corporation develops an annual work plan and discusses its progress in meeting work plan goals during its quarterly meetings, it does not publish a formal evaluation of its progress.

**Public Access.** The corporation's board includes members representative of stakeholders, including 12 members prescribed by state law: four appointed by the Governor, four by the President of the Senate, and four by the Speaker of the House. Three ex-officio members represent the Department of Children and Families, the Agency for Health Care Administration, and the Florida Association of Counties. Members include business leaders, representatives of state agencies, consumers, family members, providers, and representatives of local governments. The corporation's board holds quarterly meetings to discuss its progress, work on initiatives, and obtain input from the public. The corporation met four times during Fiscal Year 2007-08 and once so far in Fiscal Year 2008-09, and has another meeting scheduled for December 2008. The corporation's website provides general information about the corporation along with meeting dates and locations, meeting materials, and other relevant publications. The corporation collects information on the substance abuse and mental health service system, which it shares with interested stakeholders. However, this information is not routinely posted on its website.

**Assessment.** The corporation continues to fulfill a public purpose by providing advice and recommendations to the Governor, Legislature, and state agencies that address the need for substance abuse and mental health services and promoting coordination among these agencies. These agencies and the Legislature have used input from the corporation to address impediments encountered by persons needing services. The corporation is accessible to the public and its members reflect the stakeholders affected by its actions. However, the corporation could be of further benefit to the public by working more closely with the Departments of Education and Health, providing a formal assessment of progress in meeting its goals, and serving as a clearinghouse of information on state substance abuse and mental health services and issues.

**Recommendation.** Continue the Florida Substance Abuse and Mental Health Corporation with modifications. Specifically, the corporation should establish contacts and interact with the Departments of Education and Health, provide an annual written evaluation of its progress in achieving its goals, and enhance its website to serve as a clearinghouse of information on substance abuse and mental health services in Florida. No legislative action is required to implement our recommendations.

## Independent Living Services Advisory Council

Fiscal Year 2007-08 ■ Cost: \$13,858 ■ Authorization: Statutory, created in 2002, s. 409.1451(7), *Florida Statutes*

**Purpose.** The council was created to review and make recommendations regarding the implementation and operation of the Independent Living Services Program, which provides services to help young people in foster care or formerly in foster care successfully manage adult responsibilities. The council is also required to advise the department on how to better meet its established goals, identify any service barriers to effective and efficient integration of services and support across systems of care, inform the department of any successes that independent living transition services have achieved, and submit an annual report. The council continues to fulfill a public purpose by providing advice and recommendations to the Legislature and department to improve the implementation and operation of independent living services through its annual report and proposed legislation.

**Effectiveness.** The Legislature, department, and community organizations have used council recommendations to strengthen service delivery to current and former foster youth. The Legislature has adopted several council recommendations into law including expanding Medicaid eligibility for foster youth up to age 21, requiring financial literacy skills training, and requiring that a specific education and career plan be developed with each youth. The advisory council also proposed legislation that passed in the 2007 legislative session to expand services and remove barriers hindering youth from receiving services. The department also has used advice and recommendations from the council. For example, the department partnered with community-based care lead agencies to conduct the first major annual data collection of youth in foster care and formerly in foster care using a survey that included questions about life skills, housing, education, employment, health, criminal activity, access to transportation, case plan aftercare, and transitional services. Further, the council has worked with community organizations to provide better employment opportunities for youth aging out of foster care. For example, Florida's Strengthening Youth Partnerships includes a number of community organizations that provide information to the council and department on barriers to adequately preparing youth for attaining employment; the council is working with these organizations to remove those barriers.

**Public Access.** The advisory council includes 31 members representative of stakeholders such as young adults formerly in foster care and practitioners and advocates at the local, state, and national level. The council met six times in Fiscal Year 2007-08 and twice so far in Fiscal Year 2008-09. However, the council does not provide public announcements on locations and times of meetings. Also, the council does not have a website, which makes it difficult for the public and council members to find information about the council and its current and past activities.

**Assessment.** The council continues to fulfill a public purpose by providing advice and recommendations to the department and the Legislature to improve the implementation and operation of independent living services. The department, Legislature, and community organizations have used the council's advice and worked with the council to make statutory and programmatic changes and to strengthen service delivery to current and former foster youth. However, the council does not provide adequate public notice of its meetings and does not have a website to inform the public and council members about its current and past activities.

**Recommendation.** Continue the Independent Living Services Advisory Council with modifications. Specifically, the council should provide public announcements of its meetings in the *Florida Administrative Weekly* or on a council website. The council should create a website and include general information, meeting times and locations, meeting minutes, and other relevant publications. No legislative action is required to implement our recommendations.

## Refugee Services Task Forces

Fiscal Year 2007-08 ■ Cost: \$ 25,160 ■ Authorization: Federal, created in 1998 as required by *CFR 45*; the Collier County Refugee Services Task Force was created in 2005 under the same authorization

**Purpose.** Refugee Services Task Forces were created in accordance with federal rules to link refugee service providers to other services in the community that can assist refugees who meet certain federal requirements. Refugee services are funded 100% by the federal government. The federal government requires states to have local meetings to plan refugee services; the department created the regional task forces to fulfill this requirement. The task forces are narrowly focused; there is no requirement for a statewide task force and the regional task forces are not charged with advising the Legislature or the department on refugee issues. Refugee service providers assist refugees in obtaining employment, learning English, and receiving medical care. These task forces facilitate meetings for the counties that provide services to refugees. The seven regional task forces are located in Northeast Florida, Tampa/St. Petersburg, Miami, Collier and surrounding counties, Palm Beach County, Broward County, and Orlando. The task forces continue to fulfill a public purpose by linking federal, state, and local entities together in an effort to improve service delivery to refugees.

**Effectiveness.** As intended by federal requirements, the task forces bring local providers together to assist refugees. Representatives of other programs such as Economic Self-Sufficiency, KidCare, and the Occupational Health and Safety Administration make presentations to explain their services. This information allows members to identify trends, characteristics, and movements in refugee populations, share best practices, discuss new methods to efficiently deliver services to the refugee community and receive information on state regulatory and policy changes.

**Public Access.** Each regional task force includes members that represent stakeholders such as federal employees, faith-based organizations, health practitioners, employment specialists, community coordinators, attorneys, state agencies, non-profit organizations and other health and human services providers. The task forces meet either monthly or bi-monthly and all have met according to their schedules with few adjustments. However, the regional task forces do not provide adequate public notice of their meetings or have websites to post general information, meeting times, and minutes.

## Refugee Services Task Forces (continued)

**Assessment.** The Refugee Services Task Forces continue to fulfill a public purpose by linking federal, state, and local entities together in an effort to improve service delivery to refugees. The members of the regional task forces are using the advice and recommendations provided by other stakeholders to coordinate and improve service delivery to refugees in the state. Further, the task forces are keeping the state in compliance with federal funding requirements by meeting regularly throughout the year. However, although the task forces are representative of the entities they serve, they do not provide adequate public access to their meetings.

**Recommendation.** Continue the Refugee Services Task Forces with modifications. Specifically, each local task force should create websites that provide general information and meeting times and minutes. The department should add links to these websites on its refugee services webpage. No legislative action is required to implement our recommendation.

## Screening, Brief Intervention, Referral and Treatment (SBIRT) Steering Committee

Fiscal Year 2007-08 ▪ Cost: \$ 0 ▪ Authorization: Federal grant requirement, created in 2006 in accordance with federal grant from the U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Center for Substance Abuse Treatment, 2006-2011

**Purpose.** The Screening, Brief Intervention, Referral, and Treatment (SBIRT) steering committee was created to serve a narrow focus as required by a federal grant. The steering committee provides oversight and consultation on the structure and operational activities of the grant program, which provides services to adults age 55 and older who need substance abuse intervention and treatment. Grant funds are used for an evidence-based pilot project in several areas of the state. The pilot project provides services to emergency rooms, trauma centers, urgent care facilities, and primary care offices to help identify and serve older adults who are at risk of developing substance abuse disorders. The committee also is working with the department and the Agency for Health Care Administration to develop and adopt Medicaid billing codes for services so that federal funding can continue beyond the grant. The steering committee continues to fulfill a public purpose by providing oversight and consultation on the structure and operation of the grant program that helps older adults who need substance abuse intervention and treatment services.

**Effectiveness.** The department has used advice and information from the committee to develop strategies for implementing the project, establish a procurement process for providers, expand department services, and train new program staff. The department reports that the grant has enabled the department to reach 5 times more adults age 55 and older who need substance abuse services than were reached in previous years. The committee is working with the Agency on Health Care Administration to develop billing codes for Medicaid to ensure the long-term sustainability of the program.

**Public Access.** The steering committee includes 15 members representative of stakeholders such as state agencies, universities and colleges, hospitals, and elderly and physician associations. The committee did not meet during Fiscal Year 2007-08, but received information and updates through electronic mail correspondence and used this information to provide input on all issues dealing with development and implementation of the program. The committee met once so far in Fiscal Year 2008-09 and plans to meet quarterly in the future. The department did not design the committee to provide public access because of its narrow focus and the technical expertise required to develop the Medicaid billing codes. The federal grant does not require a public forum for input.

**Assessment.** The steering committee continues to fulfill a public purpose by providing oversight and consultation on the structure and operation of a grant program that helps adults age 55 and older who are at risk of developing substance abuse disorders. The department has used advice and information from the committee to implement the grant program. The steering committee is also helping develop Medicaid billing codes so that the program can continue beyond the grant. The federal grant does not require a public forum for input. The steering committee is required by the federal grant and if abolished would eliminate federal funding of \$2.8 million used to provide services.

**Recommendation.** Continue the Screening, Brief Intervention, Referral and Treatment (SBIRT) Steering Committee.

## Task Force on Child Protection

**Fiscal Year 2007-08** ■ **Cost:** \$16,003 ■ **Authorization:** Managerial initiative in 2007 and in accordance with Section 107 (a) of the Child Abuse Prevention Treatment Act of 1984, 42 U.S.C.

**Purpose.** The task force was created in 2007 by managerial initiative to examine gaps in Florida's child welfare system of care, including efforts at reunification, stabilization, permanency during foster care, and supervision. The task force submitted a report to the Secretary of the Department of Children and Families in October 2007 addressing eight tasks related to child protection review and practice, and is to issue an annual report every year thereafter. In March 2008, the department made the federally required Task Force on Children's Justice a subcommittee of the Task Force on Child Protection. The Task Force on Children's Justice was created in 1997 as a requirement of the federal Child Abuse Prevention Treatment Act, which authorizes grants to states to develop, establish, and operate programs to improve the handling of specific abuse and neglect cases. The department uses the annual Children's Justice Act federal grant funding of approximately \$800,000 for child protective investigation initiatives and child protection training, including the 2007 and 2008 Statewide Dependency Summits for child protection professionals, judges, guardians ad litem, and law enforcement personnel. In November 2008, the department established new goals for the Task Force on Child Protection and distributed a list of new members. The Task Force on Child Protection continues to fulfill a public purpose by providing advice and recommendations to the Legislature, department, law enforcement agencies, and community-based care lead agencies to strengthen the state's child welfare system.

**Effectiveness.** The task force's October 2007 report contained recommendations to the department, the Legislature, law enforcement, and community-based care lead agencies. Consistent with the report's recommendations, the Legislature passed Ch. 2008-245, *Laws of Florida*, which required law enforcement to immediately take and investigate missing children reports from the department. The legislation also expanded criminal history records checks for persons being considered as placements for foster children to include nonrelatives being considered as the placement, all members of the household of the person being considered, and frequent visitors to the household. At the recommendation of the task force, the department created the Office of Criminal Justice Services and hired six regional criminal justice coordinators to enhance cooperation between the child welfare and criminal justice systems. The department also incorporated task force recommendations into its Family Safety Training Plan to strengthen relationships between community-based care lead agencies and law enforcement.

**Public Access.** The task force includes members that represent stakeholders including law enforcement, criminal and civil court judges, attorneys, child advocates, guardians ad litem, health and mental health professionals, child protective services agencies, and various representatives of parent groups, the community, children with disabilities, victims of domestic violence, and youth. The task force met nine times during Fiscal Year 2007-08 and twice so far in Fiscal Year 2008-09. The task force's website provides general information about the council along with meeting dates and locations, meeting materials, and other relevant publications.

**Assessment.** The Task Force on Child Protection continues to fulfill a public purpose by providing advice and recommendations to the Legislature, department, law enforcement agencies, and community-based care lead agencies to strengthen the state's child welfare system. The Legislature and the department have used advice and information from the task force to make statutory, programmatic, and training changes. The department made the Task Force on Children's Justice a subcommittee of this task force, which continues to help the state draw down federal funding to provide training to child welfare and other professionals. The task force provides adequate public access through its website, which includes information on meetings and publications.

**Recommendation:** Continue the Task Force on Child Protection.

Source: OPPAGA analysis.

## The Florida Government Accountability Act Sunset Reviews

The 2006 Legislature passed the Florida Government Accountability Act (Ch. 2006-146, *Laws of Florida*) to create a Sunset review process. The act

- establishes the process, criteria, and schedule for the Legislature to assess whether state agencies and advisory committees need to continue to exist;
- provides for the creation of a Legislative Sunset Advisory Committee and describes the membership and organization of the committee and committee duties; and
- requires reports and assistance from state agencies and the Legislature's Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability (OPPAGA).



Using these reports and other information, the Sunset Advisory Committee is to produce a report that includes recommendations to abolish, continue, or reorganize an agency or advisory committee under review.

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