STATE OF WASHINGTON

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL AND HEALTH SERVICES
P.O. Box 45040, Olympia, Washington 98504-5040

December 4, 2007

Dear Tribal Leaders:

The Children's Administration values its partnership with Tribes and Recognized American Indian Organizations. I am pleased to share with you that today we are presenting the results of the Children's Administration (CA) Workload Study. While the results of this survey will require further study, the survey should provide guidance to CA, Tribes, and Recognized American Indian Organizations as we continue to look for ways to improve services and outcomes for all of our children and their families we serve.

The study shows that staff are working hard to keep children safe and provide for their ongoing needs, but still find it difficult to accomplish all the case-related work required by federal and state laws, policies, and good practice. As always, child safety is our first and foremost priority.

The Department of Social and Health Services contracted with an independent national expert on workload studies to determine how CA staff, who provide services to children and families, spend their time and the nature of the activities they perform.

This study, performed by Walter R. McDonald & Associates, Inc., in collaboration with the American Humane Association, is one of the most comprehensive in the country. Workers in Washington who provide child welfare services spend almost 70 percent of their time on tasks related specifically to a child or family—higher than has been found in similar studies in most other states. The participation rate of staff (94 percent) and number of hours they reported (91 percent) were also well above the rates found in similar studies in other states.

Using the time study data, child welfare practitioners and policy experts across the state participated in focus groups to estimate the actual amount of time needed to meet federal and state requirements and policies, and adopt good practice standards for child welfare services. This resulted in constructed standards which accurately describe the work needed to perform child welfare in Washington State as currently required in law and policy.

Key Findings:

- The constructed standards and resulting caseload recommendations are in line with similar studies in other states, including New York, Idaho, Alaska, and Montana.

- Based on the constructed standards and under existing law and policy, caseload ratios would need to be as follows:

Service Description	Ratio During Time Study*	Recommended Ratio
Intake	1:88	1:61
Child Protective Services	1:18	1:12
Family Voluntary Services (FVS)	1:29	1:12
FVS-Family Reconciliation Services	1:40	1:30
Family Dependency Services (now Child and Family Welfare Services)	1:25	1:12
Adoption Support	1:22	1:22
Foster Home Licensing (DLR)	1:33	1:17
Facility Licensing (DLR)	1:17	1:15

* These ratios are based on the number of staff who participated in the time study.

- Documenting work (computer and manual) consumed a high amount of the workers' time—over 150,000 hours out of the 375,000 worked during the 30 days—especially among case-carrying social workers.
- Research indicates that face-to-face meetings between social workers and children every month are very important in keeping children safe and meeting their ongoing needs. The study shows that visits and all of the associated work such as transportation, documentation, and follow-up contacts consume a significant amount of time.

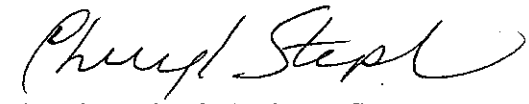
The experts who conducted the study recommend exploring ways to save time that could be reinvested in other social work tasks, as well as adding additional staff to lower caseload ratios. Areas identified in the study for further exploration include streamlining processes, shifting work from social workers to other staff, and reducing the time required for activities such as waiting at court for their case to be called, transporting clients, and case documentation.

CA will need to examine a variety of ways to close the gap between existing caseload ratios and the constructed standards. Based on the number of staff participating in the study in February, 1,540 new staff would be required if we closed the gap only with FTEs. Additional analysis and action plans must be developed.

We have started down the right path to reduce caseloads and make workload more manageable. From July 2005 through the December 2008, we will have hired over 400 social work FTEs or their direct supervisory or clerical support. Now CA has the benefit of a comprehensive workload study to identify the real need based on real time and expert analysis of what is required.

We will continue to collaborate with our partners and seek feedback as we move forward with our analysis. Again, I appreciate your efforts for the children and families we all serve, and look forward to discussing the results of the study with you. To access the summary report go to http://www.dshs.wa.gov/ca/pubs/wls2007.asp

Sincerely,



Cheryl Stephani, Assistant Secretary
Children's Administration

cc: Colleen Cawston
Nancy Dufraine