



The Senate

STATE OF IOWA
Eighty-sixth General Assembly
STATEHOUSE
Des Moines, Iowa 50319

June 14, 2017

Senator Breitbach and Rep. Kaufmann:

At the first Joint Government Oversight Committee meeting you held two weeks ago, we learned the Iowa Department of Human Services is planning to hire an out-of-state consultant to help them review their own department after the horrific deaths of two Iowa girls who were adopted out of our state's foster care system and starved to death in completely unregulated "homeschool" settings.

We believe the Joint Government Oversight Committee should continue their system oversight and to explore innovative solutions to prevent children from falling through the cracks. We urge you to quickly set additional hearing dates. The Department's review with an external partner they are hiring is not an autonomous process and should not replace the legislature's need to review as well.

Iowa children deserve the chance to grow up in safe and loving homes. We can make that happen. Here are a few of our suggestions as we work together to provide oversight and improve Iowa's child protection system.

We should have at least monthly Government Oversight meetings during the interim to review the progress of the Department of Human Services (DHS) and to hear from the DHS review team, parent groups, frontline DHS workers, Department of Education and others that are integral to Iowa child protection system.

We suggest the following areas for future meetings:

- Fix the system: Child protective workers do not have the ability to speak up about problems impacting the safety of our children, foster parents, and even themselves, without the risk of getting fired. Ensure all child protective workers are protected to speak out and discuss problems openly without retaliation. Employees shouldn't have to worry about getting fired for speaking the truth about budget cuts, policies or problems.
- Fix the system: Thousands of reports of abuse go unchecked because they are rejected at Iowa's centralized intake center. The centralized intake system takes away local relationships and knowledge that may be helpful on reported cases.
- Fix the system: DHS is denying a larger numbers of abuse calls. If a caregiver is not involved, the case is not accepted even though it may clearly be a case of abuse. If not enough information is provided, it is denied. It is unclear if criminal cases are referred to law enforcement. Proper checks and balances – including tracking these rejected cases – are not in place.
- Protect our children: A thorough review of case plans to ensure we know where these kids are and get safety nets reestablished.

- Protect our children: Child protective workers are overworked and carry unmanageable caseloads. The department is dangerously understaffed. Several Iowa counties don't even have one caseworker. Some case workers must cover multiple counties. Governor Reynolds should transfer funds to ensure DHS child protective services do not suffer another funding blow before the Legislature returns in January.
- Protect our children: Iowa's law that removed any regulation on homeschooling has given bad parents the power to isolate abuse and starve children. The department has no idea how many Iowa foster children are in these types of settings. The Department of Human Services should immediately require all foster care children to attend public or private school. IOWA KIDS MUST NOT FALL OFF THE RADAR.

Please let us know of your plans to call future Government Oversight Committee meetings. We look forward to working with you both and the rest of the committee in our efforts to provide oversight and improve Iowa's child protection system.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Matt McCoy". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Matt" being more prominent than the last name "McCoy".

Senator Matt McCoy, Ranking Member

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Janet Petersen". The signature is cursive and elegant, with the first name "Janet" being more prominent than the last name "Petersen".

Senator Janet Petersen