

From: [Sunset Advisory Commission](#)
To: [Janet Wood](#)
Subject: FW: Form submission from: Public Input Form for Agencies Under Review (Public/After Publication)
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From: sundrupal@capitol.local [<mailto:sundrupal@capitol.local>]
Sent: Monday, June 30, 2014 5:09 PM
To: Sunset Advisory Commission
Subject: Form submission from: Public Input Form for Agencies Under Review (Public/After Publication)

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Agency: DEPARTMENT FAMILY AND PROTECTIVE SERVICES DFPS

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City: Kingsland

State: Texas

Your Comments About the Staff Report, Including Recommendations Supported or Opposed:

My name is Kristen Harris. I left CPS in April of 2014 after 8 years of service with the agency. When deciding to leave CPS, I really struggled, but knew that leaving CPS was what would be best for me at this time. I had always seen myself as someone who would likely retire from CPS, but the reality is that the stress of the job is enormous and that there is not enough support from the system as a whole to do the job the way it should be done. I have worked in multiple CPS offices from Austin to Midland/Odessa and everywhere in between. I was a supervisor at CPS in both rural and urban areas. I can honestly say that in my time with the agency I have never met a worker there who does not care about their job and keeping children safe.

However, the job, quite honestly, is impossible to do. Every worker wakes up each morning with a list of tasks that is daunting and never-ending. The inability to ever complete each task is overwhelming for most and very disheartening because at the end of the day the workers know that their clients did not really get the quality of service that the workers would hope to provide. I state this because Issue 1 discusses Turnover, but many of the other issues discussed in this report could be resolved if CPS simply had the manpower that the agency needs in order to adequately complete the job. Yes, CPS is a crisis culture and CPS is not adequately focusing on management activities to support the work, yes CPS is not capturing adequate information in order to really measure the effectiveness and, yes, CPS is not adequately utilizing stakeholder information, which I know first-hand because I am now with one of the largest stakeholder groups in my area (CASA). However, if staff are overworked and stressed beyond measure, who will do the extra work that it will take to resolve all of these issues? The bottom line is that if the work of a CPS field worker is to remain as it is intended, caseloads need to go down and supervisors need to be able to truly supervise with no more than 4 or 5 workers under them at any given time, even when taking into consideration that they may be covering another unit until a replacement supervisor is hired because the prior supervisor left the agency or changed positions. The supervisor to worker ratio needs to be strongly considered because with large numbers of workers under 1 supervisor child safety becomes difficult to

manage.

The hiring process should allow for a position to be posted as soon as someone states their intention to leave a position and their position should be filled before they leave, when at all possible. Yet, this does not happen and positions are often left vacant for months while the rest of the unit has to carry the burden because they are down a worker.

As a person who was incredibly dedicated to my job while at CPS, I sometimes found it disheartening that other state agencies provide their employees with many more resources than CPS, yet the job of a CPS worker is one of the toughest of all of the state employees. When discussing turnover, one needs to take into consideration how CPS workers often feel much less valued than counterparts in other state agencies because of the way that the state treats these employees. CPS workers do not get hazard pay as do some other state agency employees, yet the job is very risky. Workers are often knocking on doors where violence and drugs are aplenty, yet the workers do not have anything, but their wits to protect them. Other state agencies also provide better reimbursement programs to employees and pay better wages as well.

Yet, CPS workers are treated with less regard and I can only assume that it is because DFPS is one of the largest state agencies and it would be too expensive to offer the same programs to the CPS workers. I agree with the person who commented that providing cars and gas cards would be beneficial.

I know that it would not be possible to provide a car for every employee to use, but there are ways to incorporate this idea, such as having a number of cars per office for workers to use on longer trips and gas cards issued to supervisors to provide to workers on an as-needed basis. I think that bringing back the peer trainer program is an excellent idea and I do not agree that supervisors and workers can be identified to act as trainers as an alternative. Workers and supervisors all have their own roles and it is daunting for a worker or supervisor to constantly be pulled to help train a new worker while also trying to maintain the integrity of their own work.

There must be true mentors identified whose role is only to train and work with employees who need help. I like the idea of having a unit to consolidate workforce support and complete tasks, such as exit interviews. I also think that adding worker retention duties to this unit would be good, but these projects must be funded. I know too many CPS managers who spend countless dollars out of their own pockets in an effort to retain staff.

To address turnover further, State Office needs to take a closer look at the regions who are able to retain at higher rates and ask how they are doing this. I have worked in Regions 7 and 2 and 9 and I can attest that stress levels are much higher in Region 7, yet I cannot quite put my finger on the reasons. I have ideas about it, but the actual reasons are difficult to pinpoint. This needs to be further explored. If the issue of turnover can be appropriately addressed than I do believe that several other issues brought up can be more adequately addressed as well.

Issue 8 regarding stakeholder input is an issue that I see now more than ever. As a prior CPS worker I heard a lot of negative things from stakeholders while still employed by CPS, but it is amazing how many more negative things people are willing to share with one who no longer works at CPS. Most stakeholders feel that they are not being heard or valued by CPS and in some instances this is true. I think that some of this is because CPS workers are too busy to slow down and listen. I also think that some of this is a culture of CPS that needs to be changed. As a CASA representative, I feel that stakeholders opinions need to be listened to and valued, yet oftentimes the opinion of the CASA is dismissed. CPS needs to work on their culture around this issue and workers need to be trained to understand that CASA workers and volunteers really are there to help and reduce their level of work by being an extra set of eyes on the children. This is the intention of CASA. The new issues addressed in the report state that CPS should be required to respond to major concerns raised by CASA within an agreed timeframe. This requirement, however, should not be necessary. CPS workers should be working with CASA, but since this is not occurring across the board a requirement would be beneficial to the children. CASA cannot make informed decisions and advocate for the best interest of the children if CPS is not providing the information to CASA. Workers need to trained on how to interact with stakeholders and parties to the cases that they are assigned. Any other ideas on how to address this issue would be greatly beneficial to CASA and to all stakeholders.

Any Alternative or New Recommendations on This Agency: See above. I've incorporated this in the paragraphs above.

My Comment Will Be Made Public: I agree