



Date: May 27, 2009

Governor Appoints Members to Task Force on Disproportionality in Child Welfare

SALEM – Oregon Department of Human Services announced today that Governor Kulongoski has appointed members to the new Task Force on Disproportionality in Child Welfare. The group met for the first time in Salem May 20.

The task force was created in January 2009 by executive order. It will study and report on the reasons that Native American and African American children are over-represented in the foster care system compared to their numbers in the general population. The group will report its findings and make recommendations to the Legislature by October 2010 to produce better outcomes for all children and their families, including those focusing on communities of color.

“The time has come for us to move beyond good intentions to intentional action so that we can ensure that children with the same needs are treated equitably... no matter the color of their skin,” Governor Kulongoski said in January.

Today, African American children make up 2.3 percent of Oregon's child population, but they account for 7.3 percent of Oregon's foster care population. Native American children make up 1.3 percent of Oregon's population, but they account for 10 percent of Oregon's foster care population. By comparison, white children comprise 71 percent of Oregon's child population but only 61 percent of Oregon's foster care population.

National studies show that children of color are not abused at higher rates than their white counterparts, but when a child of color enters a foster care system, those children and their families are treated differently.

The task force, which includes a majority of members representing minority populations, will be staffed by the Department of Human Services Children, Adults and Families Division (CAF). The Governor's task force is part of a larger effort by

DHS, the Oregon Commission on Children and Families and national foundation Casey Family Programs to support Oregon's efforts to safely reduce the number of Oregon children in foster care.

Members of the Task Force on Disproportionality in Child Welfare are listed below:

Oregon Senate

Senator Martha Schrader – District 20

Oregon House of Representatives

Representative Mike Schaufler -- District 48

Oregon Tribal Child Welfare

Dottie Garcia -- Indian child welfare specialist, Confederated Tribes of Coos, Lower Umpqua and Siuslaw Indians, Inc.

Oregon Commission on Children and Families

Reverend Mark Knutson -- Augustana Lutheran Church, Portland

Oregon Youth Authority

Alex Contreras -- Parole and Probation Officer, Malheur County OYA

Refugee

Sokhom Tauch – executive director, Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization (IRCO), Portland

Child Welfare Advisory Committee

Janet Arenz – executive director, Oregon Alliance of Children’s Programs, Salem

Law enforcement

(TBA)

Education community

Margarett Peoples -- Oregon Education Association, ethnic minority director

Community mental health

Frank Hanna-Williams – executive director, Tillamook County Family Counseling Center

General Public

Michael M. Ware -- director, Community and Family Programs, Self Enhancement, Inc., Portland

Joshua Griggs - PSU SkillsUSA student advisory, former foster youth, Portland

Hon. Lola SoHappy - former Chief Judge Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs Reservation, Warm Springs Tribal Court

Oregon Judicial Department

Judge Nan Waller -- Multnomah County Circuit Court

Public defense

Kristy Barrett – director, Native American Program, Legal Aid Services of Oregon, Portland

Oregon University System

Dr. Terry Ross -- director for community and diversity, Oregon State University

Child advocacy

Brenda Edwards -- CASA volunteer, Jackson County

Nichole Maher, MPH -- executive director, Native American Youth and Family Center (NAYA), Portland

Lorenzo Poe -- senior policy advisor, Multnomah County

Foster parents / relative caregivers

Lon Getlin – Multnomah County

Gloria Harris – Washington County

In work related to the new task force, the Department of Human Services, in partnership with Oregon's nine federally recognized Tribes, convened a first-ever "N8V Summit" on May 13-14 to create action plans to reduce the over-representation of Native American children in state custody and the state's compliance with the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA). In the 1970s, Congress enacted ICWA, in response to a national crisis in which an alarmingly high percentage of Native American children were being removed from their families and tribal communities. ICWA assigns an enhanced responsibility to states to make "active efforts" to prevent removal of tribal children from their families.

"This work is one of child welfare's top priorities," said Erinn Kelley-Siel, interim director of DHS Children, Adults and Families Division. "We must act to eliminate disparities and ensure that Oregon has a child welfare system that serves every child and their family fairly and equitably. The only way we can accomplish that is by meaningfully engaging the communities, families and children who are impacted by our work, and I am thankful to the groups who are coming together across the state to support this effort."