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OFFICE OF THE STATE COMPTROLLER

May 12, 2000

Mr. John A. Johnson
Commissioner
Office of Children and Family Services
Capital View Office Park
Rensselaer, New York 12144

Re: Report 2000-F-3

Dear Mr. Johnson:

Pursuant to the State Comptroller's authority as set forth in Article V, Section 1 of the State Constitution and Article II, Section 8 of the State Finance Law, we have reviewed the actions taken by officials of the Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS), as of April 25, 2000, to implement the recommendations in our audit report, *Effectiveness of the Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention and Services Program* (Report 97-S-34). Our report, which was issued August 5, 1998, examined the effectiveness and management of that program.

Background

On August 20, 1997, the Governor signed welfare reform legislation that abolished the Department of Social Services and created a new agency in its place: the Department of Family Assistance. OCFS became part of this new agency and currently has oversight responsibility for the Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention and Services (APPS) Program. The overall goal of the APPS program is to provide comprehensive services to an at-risk, pregnant and parenting population to reduce the adolescent pregnancy rate and to promote self-sufficiency. The APPS program is carried out by 28 community service projects (CSPs). Each CSP has a community council that is responsible for the planning and selection of service providers. This council may include community residents, service providers, local government representatives and other interested parties. The council oversees the development of service programs, coordinates services with existing providers in the community, and directs all funding. The Governor's 2000-01 Executive Budget includes a recommendation that the APPS program be transferred to the New

York State Department of Health where it will be consolidated with several other programs that promote abstinence, and maternal and newborn health.

Summary Conclusions

In our prior report, we found that the APPS program appeared to be effective in reducing the incidence of pregnancy and in promoting self sufficiency among adolescents enrolled in the program. However, we indicated that OCFS needed to develop a suitable means of tracking clients' progress after discharge to gauge the program's long-term impact. We also felt that CSPs and providers needed to capitalize on their opportunity to network and share program practices, and that OCFS needed to act to improve the accuracy of service data CSPs submit and help CSPs record and track performance targets.

In our follow-up review, we found that OCFS officials have made substantial progress in implementing the recommendations contained in our prior report. OCFS has begun to develop a suitable means of tracking clients' progress after discharge to gauge the program's long-term impact. In addition, OCFS has initiated meetings designed to give CSPs the opportunity to network and share program practices. We also note that OCFS has taken steps to improve the accuracy of service data CSPs submit and to help CSPs record and track performance targets.

Status of Prior Audit Recommendations

Of the nine prior audit recommendations, OCFS officials have implemented five recommendations and partially implemented four recommendations.

Follow-up Observations

Recommendation 1

Identify methodologies to track discharged clients to measure the program's long-term effectiveness.

Recommendation 2

Initiate a pilot program at one of the CSPs to:

- ! track program participants who have successfully completed the program;*
- ! determine their status after program completion; and*
- ! assess the program's long-term effectiveness.*

Status - Partially Implemented

Agency Action - OCFS officials have identified methodologies to track discharged clients. This was accomplished through meetings with the Oswego County Community Council and through the efforts of a research assistant from the State University of New York at Potsdam. Under consideration is the use of OCFS' Geographic Information System data to track individual clients by Zip code to facilitate follow-up studies. OCFS has scheduled a meeting for May 2000 to take additional steps toward implementing a pilot program to finalize the tracking project, determine the status of discharged clients, and to assess the program's long-term effectiveness.

Recommendation 3

Continue to foster communication among CSPs and providers to enhance program quality.

Status - Implemented

Agency Action - OCFS has taken steps to foster communication among the CSPs. These steps include periodic APPS Coordinator's meetings. Such meetings were held in October 1998 and May 1999. A similar meeting is scheduled for May 2000.

Recommendation 4

Require that contract managers and CSP coordinators at lead agencies include testing of a sample of monthly reports for accuracy and reliability of supporting documentation in their annual re-applications.

Status - Partially implemented

Agency Action - OCFS has modified reviews of not-for profit lead agencies to include a review of monthly reports. In addition, OCFS issued a request for proposal which will provide a process for collecting data which can supplement work completed during site visits. OCFS plans to work to modify its data system as a result of this contract. OCFS hopes that the revised system will provide necessary data to monitor program compliance and data accuracy. The data contract has not yet been finalized due to the proposed movement of the APPS program to the State Department of Health.

Recommendation 5

Develop guidelines stating the responsibilities of lead agencies and providers with regard to maintaining sufficient supporting documentation.

Status - Implemented

Agency Action - OCFS reissued guidelines setting forth the responsibilities of lead agencies and providers pertaining to documentation. In addition, these guidelines were discussed at the October 1998 meeting between OCFS and the APPS coordinators.

Recommendation 6

Emphasize to providers the importance of maintaining accurate and reliable data for reporting to program managers and stakeholders.

Status - Implemented

Agency Action - During site visits to subcontractors, OCFS officials have taken steps to emphasize the importance of maintaining accurate and reliable data. For example, during these visits, OCFS officials review with the subcontractors and providers its policies and procedures for collecting and reporting program data.

Recommendation 7

Develop a method for CSPs and providers to record and track attainment of performance targets.

Status - Partially Implemented

Agency Action - OCFS program staff are working to track performance target attainment using information in its data system. In addition, OCFS is reviewing responses to a request for proposal to complete required system modifications. The local coordinators are working with OCFS to ensure that the revised system meets both State and local needs. OCFS plans to work to modify its data system to record and track the attainment of performance targets as a result of its award of the data collection contract. The data contract has not yet been finalized due to the proposed movement of the APPS program to the State Department of Health.

Recommendation 8

Compare the milestones developed for the annual application to the actual results obtained by the providers to determine changes to services that may be necessary.

Status - Implemented

Agency Action - OCFS officials have incorporated these actions as part of their semiannual site visits by OCFS contract managers.

Recommendation 9

Develop written procedures with regard to contract managers oversight of CSPs and providers. Procedures should include, but not be limited to, making regular visits to CSPs and providers and verifying the existence and appropriateness of performance targets and/or milestones.

Status - Implemented

Agency Action - OCFS officials have developed written procedures describing the contract managers' responsibilities to be carried out during semiannual site visits to the CSPs and providers.

Major contributors to this report included Richard Sturm.

We would appreciate your response to this report within 30 days, indicating any action planned or taken to address any unresolved matters discussed in this report. We also thank Office management and staff for the courtesies and cooperation extended to our auditor during this review.

Very truly yours,

William P. Challice
Audit Director

cc: Charles Conaway
Mary Ellen Flaxman