

**Children and Youth Committee Public Hearing
CYS Caseworker Complement and Retention
Monday, April 4, 2016
Room 60 East Wing
Harrisburg, PA**

Good Morning, I would first like to thank Chairwoman Watson, Vice Chairman Maul, Executive Director Greg Grasa, as well as the Honorable Committee for this opportunity. My name is Shiloh Hagerty and I am currently employed as an Intake/Investigation Caseworker at Cumberland County Children & Youth Services. I have been in the Child Welfare field for twelve years. I began working in Monroe County Children & Youth Services in April 2004 as an In Home Services caseworker. As an In Home Services Caseworker, I monitored the safety of children while they continued to reside in the home with their caregiver(s). After one to two years I transferred to the Intake/Investigations Unit where I conducted child abuse and neglect investigations as well as general protective services assessments. As an Intake Caseworker, one conducts investigations of serious abuse, including sexual, physical, and emotional abuse to a child as well as serious neglect of a child. An Intake caseworker also conducts assessments of general concerns, including but not limited to, deplorable housing, drug/alcohol concerns of children and caregivers, ungovernable children, truancy, lack of supervision, etc. I continued to work at Monroe County Children & Youth Services until August 2008. I then began working at my current employer, Cumberland County Children & Youth Services as an Intake Caseworker that I have continued to do since September 2008.

As a caseworker you are put in various different roles while working with families as well as testifying in courts. A caseworker often times needs to be a counselor, a mediator for separated parents who refuse to speak with each other, a parenting educator, knowledgeable of drugs/alcohol and psychiatric terminology, experts in medical terminology regarding various injuries to a child, knowledgeable in developmental milestones of children, and forensic interviewing.

Since being in the Child Welfare field I have seen numerous deficits to the system which prevent Children & Youth Agencies and their caseworkers to complete their job effectively and to assure the safety of children to the fullest extent possible.

One deficit includes an enormous amount of paperwork that has to be completed by a caseworker while conducting an investigation/assessment of a family as well as providing ongoing services to a family. The amount of paperwork over the past twelve years has drastically increased, causing caseworkers to spend numerous hours at the office or on a computer rather than where they need to be, with the families they are working with.

When I first began as a caseworker, I was able to complete necessary paperwork for one family in a minimum of thirty minutes. Currently with the amount of paperwork required to be completed for one family, it will take one to two hours at minimum. Caseworkers are required to complete paperwork on several different forms which are repetitive of each other.

For example to complete an investigation/assessment a caseworker will need to complete thorough dictation which includes the allegations being addressed with the family, interviews of each family member, how a caseworker concludes a child is safe including how a child is disciplined, what the home appears like, how a child's needs are being met. A risk assessment must be completed to explain any

future risk of a child of being abused or neglected. A safety assessment must also be completed to describe how a child is currently safe, safe with a safety plan, or unsafe. In addition to those forms, a caseworker must then assure the family's identifying and contact information is up to date in the CAPS (computer system used by Children & Youth Agencies state wide) which is tedious work that can take up to one hour or more to complete depending on the amount of members in a case. Once the information is updated, caseworkers must then complete a CY48, which is a form addressing each allegation reported and the outcome of each allegation. A caseworker must then send out letters to a family informing them of the outcome. If a family is accepted for In Home services then there is more paperwork including; taking identifying photos of children, sending out releases and record requests letters to providers of the family, and family team letters. This is just a sampling of the amount of paperwork needed to properly document the casework provided to a family.

Although thorough documentation and completing risk and safety assessments is necessary in this field, the time spent doing so for each family leads into another deficit in the Child Welfare field which is high caseloads; creating unrealistic demands on a caseworker.

When a report is assigned to a caseworker, the caseworker has a response time, determined by a supervisor, to see the children in the home which can be anywhere from immediate to ten days depending on the severity of the allegations reported. Most often, response times occur within 1-5 days from the date a report was made. A caseworker can be assigned numerous referrals in a day causing a caseworker to often work overtime to meet the demands of these response times. A caseworker working overtime several times a week and rarely getting a lunch break, leads to many other personal issues, as you could imagine.

Caseworkers are working numerous hours of overtime in the evenings after working an eight hour day and typically working through lunch. Caseworkers do this several nights a week causing a lot of stress on the caseworker as well as their personal families. Caseworkers are people who also have families at home who need their love and support. When caseworkers have high caseloads creating unrealistic demands as well as state set deadlines of paperwork, the caseworker's own family suffers.

In addition, over the past several years' caseworkers are required to attend family engagement meetings which were developed to help the children and families succeed, however these meetings require a heavy time commitment for a caseworker with a high caseload. Some of those additional requirements; include Family Group Decision Making Conference which is a several hour meeting; a Full Disclosure meeting that occurs directly after court when a child is removed from their caregiver(s); Family Finding for children in placement, and Family Team Meetings to develop the goals and objectives for a family. All of the meetings are very important in effective casework however they take several hours to coordinate and attend.

I have seen many caseworkers leave the Child Welfare profession due to the demands and stress of the job. I have seen very skilled caseworkers go to lower paying jobs because of the stress of being a caseworker. Many caseworkers who have left Children & Youth Agencies have expressed how they miss the job and working with children and helping families in various ways. In addition, previous caseworkers have expressed to me how they could never return to being a caseworker due to the stress and overtime requirements of the job.

I have heard several times by caseworkers that they have to put their jobs before their own children and families. That should not be the case in any person's job however that is the reality of being a caseworker. A caseworker must complete their paperwork and assure the safety of child(ren) by a deadline, often times preventing them from spending crucial time with their own families .

Another deficit in the Child Welfare System is a lack of funding for Children & Youth Agencies.

Caseworkers, in spite of being professionals have low incomes, making the Child Welfare Field difficult to remain in.

The Child Welfare System as a whole lacks funding not just for the income of caseworkers but to provide services for families. In most cases, if a service is provided to the family to help with parenting concerns, discipline, parent/child conflicts, drug/alcohol concerns, mental health concerns; the family will succeed and can prevent the placement of children.

However providing services to a family can be difficult on a low budget for the Child Welfare System. If the Child Welfare System was provided additional funding, we would be able to provide necessary services to families and sufficient incomes to caseworkers; which may help with the high turnover rate of caseworkers.

Another concern in retaining caseworkers is the lack of incentives for a caseworker to remain in the Child Welfare System. There is very little opportunity for a caseworker to be promoted. A caseworker may be able to become a supervisor at some point in their career, however if one succeeds in doing so there is not much more opportunity to be promoted from there. This causes caseworkers to seek employment elsewhere where they can be promoted and attain a sense of accomplishment. As of this time there are Caseworker I's, which many surpass at the hiring stage; Caseworker II's which encompasses the majority of caseworkers in the field; and a handful of Caseworker III's in each county. A Caseworker III specializes in one service area of the agency, making those positions very limited. As an example, I have been a Caseworker II for twelve years, proving that most caseworkers remain at the Caseworker II level for their entire career.

Since being a caseworker there have also been many positive changes as well. The development of a statewide computer based system (CAPS/CWIS) allowing caseworkers to be able to work from home, is a great opportunity to be able to complete necessary paperwork. However being able to schedule a day to work from home can become very difficult when having high caseload and demands that require you to be in the field working with families. On the downside, the computer system has thus resulted in system failures and errors that have also forced caseworkers to spend numerous hours trying to fix those problems. Having the accessibility of CAPS/CWIS at home may also result in a caseworker working more often than they should due to the demands of a caseworker to complete their work.

An idea mentioned by several caseworkers, including myself, would be creating a "second shift" for Children & Youth Agencies which would allow caseworker's to work evening hours rather than having to work overtime.

I truly believe based upon my first-hand experience in working in the field for twelve years, it has been proven that having a manageable caseload of approximately 15 families per caseworker would drastically decrease the stress of the job. Having a manageable case load would allow caseworkers to spend more

time with their clients to assure that children are safe and that caregivers are being the most effective they can be for those children. Caseworkers would be able to complete their paperwork in a timely manner and attend necessary family engagement meetings. If having a manageable case load would reduce stress and overall paperwork then many caseworkers may choose to remain in the Child Welfare System making caseworker retention an obtainable outcome.

Additionally, a lot of caseworkers are not treated as professionals by the community including by clients and other professionals. If we can raise public awareness about the profession in colleges/universities, law enforcement, the medical field, the educational system, and through positive news reports in the media, then caseworkers may also feel more valued in this profession.

Hiring the best individuals for the caseworker job may also start within the communities. Teaching and preparing students interested in the Child Welfare field, the reality of the job, is key to caseworker retention. Many students who intern at Children & Youth Agencies may be hired as caseworkers after their internships are completed, however once hired and realizing the stress of carrying a high caseload, often results in them leaving the profession. During the hiring process, it is very important for employers to be honest with potential caseworker hires, regarding the benefits of the position as well also speaking about the potential problems areas. There have been numerous caseworkers I have worked with, that left the job due to not being fully aware of the stress and long hours the job requires.

Caseworkers also are in need of training more related to their job duties. New caseworkers go through a series of module trainings focused on completing paperwork and general casework practice. Trainings geared toward the specific casework practices in the field such as analyzing different types of injuries, interviewing perpetrators, recognizing signs of abuse, mental health and Drug/Alcohol use; may help a caseworker be confident in the field.

In conclusion, I did not choose this profession because I thought I would become wealthy, however I did choose this career for the love of helping and working with children. I continue to work in this career because I do enjoy knowing that I have helped to improve the life of a child(ren) and/or caregivers. Caseworkers are called more names than one can imagine, caseworkers are threatened often by families out of fear of the child(ren) being removed. However, there are rare instances that caseworkers do receive a "thank you" from a child and/or caregiver(s) for helping them, which is invaluable to a caseworker. Knowing they have truly helped a family and been recognized for such is worth the work that we do. I do know that if the deficiencies in the Child Welfare field are not fixed, that this is not a career myself, those just starting or those with experience would be able to continue in. Addressing the caseworker retention issues and improving caseworkers job experience is where the start of improving the overall Child Welfare System begins. If we can start now to move toward more positive changes in the Child Welfare System and retaining caseworkers, this may one day be an issue of the past.

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