

Media Release

Date: January 4, 2012
From: Brad Yarbrough, Chairman
Human Services Commission
Re: Settlement Agreement
Children's Rights Litigation

The Commission believes that the approved settlement is in the best interest of the Agency and the people of Oklahoma it serves. The agreement provides a realistic framework to make improvements in the delivery of child welfare services and, as a result, better protect vulnerable children.

Our first priority must be to underscore the need for strong, safe and healthy families. All Oklahomans must unite their efforts to bolster the old-fashioned idea of kids growing up in good homes. But, when parents and caregivers put children at measurable risk of great harm, the DHS must respond in excellent fashion.

The agreement provides for three national child welfare experts to have total access to the DHS and work with agency staff. Other national consultants will be called upon to identify issues that prevent us from attaining that standard which is stated on the DHS logo... "EXCELLENCE".

The Commission recognizes the difficult tasks faced daily by our child welfare staff and their commitment to professionally serve children and families. But, the Commission also understands that too many Oklahomans have been dissatisfied in their dealings with the DHS. We view this settlement as an opportunity to help our staff help create better outcomes than we have previously achieved.

The Commission welcomes the opportunity to work with agency leadership, its staff, national experts, child welfare consultants, the Governor and the Legislature (both Speaker Steele and the House task force headed by Rep. Jason Nelson and President Pro Tem Bingman). This settlement gives a place for all of these parties to help craft a real improvement plan to help Oklahoma families.

Excellence will come with a cost. I'm confident Oklahomans and their elected leaders will give the resources required to achieve this most worthy goal. The Commission has committed itself to reaching the objectives of this settlement... serving children and families with excellence.