

Statement from Bill J. Crouch, Cabinet Secretary, West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources:

The West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources (DHHR) began making changes to the state's child welfare system in 2013, and has increased those efforts every year since then. Important and significant changes to the system have continued under the leadership of Gov. Jim Justice, including children's wraparound services, increasing the number of Child Protective Service (CPS) staff in the state, becoming one of the early adopters to begin implementation of the Family First Prevention Services Act, submission of an application for Medicaid waiver for Children with Serious Emotional Disorders and more. This March, the West Virginia Legislature made child welfare a priority and passed a bill allowing DHHR to contract with a managed care organization to help ensure all children in foster care receive the care they need. This administration and the West Virginia Legislature have invested more resources into the child welfare system than any other administration. We have been consistent and deliberate in our commitment to the safety and well-being of West Virginia's children.

DHHR knows it cannot accomplish this goal without CPS workers, the foundation of West Virginia's child welfare system. DHHR added more than 50 CPS positions throughout the state in the last year in areas where caseloads were high and has budgeted additional CPS workers in the upcoming budget. We have increased salaries an additional 10% above the 5% increases approved last year and this year, resulting in a total increase of 20% increase for CPS workers over the last two years. We have added recruitment incentives and retention incentives for workers, as well.

West Virginia has a quality group of residential providers who are committed to caring for children in our state; they share the same goal regarding the safety and well-being of our children and are considered partners with these ongoing improvements to the child welfare system.

The company that filed this lawsuit against the State of West Virginia has not reached out to me or any member of our leadership team to ask questions regarding what we are doing in this state or to even engage in a conversation regarding these issues. It appears that their 12 a.m. embargoed lawsuit was aimed to gain attention in the press, as they have done in several other states. We are always willing to talk about our problems in West Virginia, and work together with our partners and others to improve the services and the care of our children.

One of our newer partners is the US Department of Justice; they are working closely with us to help in further transforming and improving our child welfare system. We value their input and their guidance. This is being done through a Memorandum of Understanding that avoids an expensive lawsuit that would likely cost the state millions of dollars; money that would reduce the amount we have available for services and improvements to the system.

The lawsuit that was filed today will cost the State of West Virginia millions of dollars and was filed by a company that has never contacted us to ask the question: "What are you doing to fix these problems?" We welcome the opportunity to make our case in court.