

From: Danieli, Sharon (DHHS)
Sent: Tuesday, December 22, 2015 9:35 AM
To: Lyon, Nick (DHHS)
Cc: Grijalva, Nancy (DHHS)
Subject: News Articles - Morning of 12/22/15

GONGWER:

Virginia Tech Researcher Claims Stonewalling On Lead Data

The Department of Health and Human Services had data that showed there were elevated lead levels in Flint's water, but delayed in releasing that data to others for review, Virginia Tech professor Marc Edwards said in an article posted to his website documenting the city's water crisis.

Department officials agreed and said the experience led to changes in how they examine data.

Mr. Edwards said the department had data from shortly after Flint changed its water source that showed a spike in blood lead levels in children in two at-risk neighborhoods, but did not disclose that data until September 2015. "They discovered scientifically conclusive evidence of an anomalous increase in childhood lead poisoning in summer 2014 immediately after the switch in water sources, but stood by silently as Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) officials repeatedly and falsely stated that no spike in blood lead levels (BLL) of children had occurred," he said in the [post](#).

DHHS spokesperson Jennifer Eisner agreed the department had data that showed the spike, but said its analysis at the time overlooked factors that, in retrospect, would have shown there was a water quality problem. "When initially looking at the citywide and county elevated blood lead level numbers, the increase appeared to be consistent with the seasonal fluctuation seen in the summer months," Ms. Eisner said. "It wasn't until the Hurley report came out that our epidemiologists took a more in-depth look at the data by ZIP code, controlling for seasonal variation, and confirmed an increase outside of normal trends. As a result of this process, we have determined that the way we analyze data collected needs to be thoroughly reviewed."

Mr. Edwards said DHHS officials also stonewalled him on getting access to that data. He said data he had gotten easily in 2006 documents for a similar review took several weeks to receive after his request sent September 2. When he did finally receive the data, he said it was a version that omitted the lead level spike from summer 2014 that the department had created in July. He said a series of emails he received under a recent Freedom of Information Act request showed an intention by DHHS officials to keep the reports from the public. "Our FOIA reveals a shocking DHHS graph created in October 2015. It shows the statistically significant spike in blood lead that occurred in summer 2014 - the scientific result that DHHS has never publicly acknowledged," Mr. Edwards said in his post.

Ms. Eisner said the department has worked to make the data available. "Summary reports outlining blood lead level testing are posted online on a bi-weekly basis, and we work closely with local partners to fulfill data requests as we receive them," she said.

- See more at: http://www.gongwer.com/programming/news.cfm?newsedition_id=5424901#sthash.iGEYv4UV.dpuf

Feds Praise State's Child Welfare Progress

The federal government complimented the changes made to the state's child welfare services, saying it is leading to more vulnerable children finding safe and permanent homes, according the Department of Health and Human

Services. U.S. Administration for Children and Families Commissioner Rafael Lopez recognized a variety of changes made to the child welfare system, a statement from DHHS said. The state's Children's Services Agency oversees protective services, foster care, adoption and juvenile justice systems. "The successful completion of this program improvement plan is a milestone for both Michigan and ACF," Mr. Lopez wrote. "It represents dedication and commitment from staff at every level."

The federal government told the state in 2009 it was not in compliance with federal guidelines, and the state has been working on improving its child welfare system since then. The statement said when Governor Rick Snyder took office in 2011, he made improving the state's child welfare system one of his top goals, and now the state has succeeded in meeting the federal goals, leading to potential federal penalties of at least \$2.8 million being rescinded. "I am proud of the progress that Michigan has made in taking care of children who have been abused and neglected," Mr. Snyder said. "It is gratifying to know that the U.S. Administration for Children and Families has recognized the reforms we have implemented. We have more work to do, but there is no doubt that Michigan's vulnerable children receive better services today than they did five years ago."

The letter demonstrates that Michigan is succeeding in providing coordinated services to vulnerable children and families, said DHHS Director Nick Lyon. "We want kids in the state's child welfare system to safely return to their homes or find a loving, permanent home through adoption if it's determined it is not safe for them to be reunited with their parents," he said. "There are about 13,000 children in Michigan's foster care system at any given time who have been removed from their homes due to abuse or neglect."

- See more at: http://www.gongwer.com/programming/news.cfm?newsedition_id=5424901#sthash.iGEYv4UV.dpuf

Newly published study gives more evidence of elevated lead in Flint kids (Flint Journal)

Michigan Medicaid system hits the cloud (Lansing State Journal)

Michigan meets child welfare goals (Lansing State Journal)

MIRS:

Lyon: Achieving Vision For DHHS Merger Could Need Federal Changes

Nearly a year after the massive merger of the state's health and human services departments, its leader said some state and local silos have fallen as a result, but more need to follow -- including at the federal level.

The creation of the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) was the big administrative story earlier this year after Gov. Rick SNYDER announced he wanted to merge the two biggest state departments into one gigantic one (See "Snyder Pens Order Creating New Department of Health & Human Services," 2/6/15).

DHHS Director Nick **LYON**, in a year-end interview with *MIRS*, said the merger has bore fruit already, including the state better serving people whose needs overlap the two halves of DHHS.

For instance, when it comes to foster care children, the state is working to make sure kids who are removed from their homes -- a human services function -- get hooked up with a behavioral health provider and a primary care physician.

"There is no doubt that a child removed is going to suffer some sort of trauma from that event," Lyon said. "And we need to treat them as quickly as possible."

Another area Lyon is looking at is making eligibility seamless for Medicaid recipients who need food assistance.

And while Lyon said field offices across the state have gotten a better handle on the various programs offered through DHHS, he said the state still faces a "silo system" when it comes to local public health departments and community mental health agencies, although he said there's been some communication improvements there.

The goal of creating DHHS in the first place -- according to Snyder, Lyon and other state officials -- was to move to a system built around treating the "whole person" rather than just categorizing clients into various assistance programs.

One roadblock to this: The federal government hasn't necessarily adopted the same model, and the DHHS has to deal with a lot of federal programs in different places.

"We're still dealing with siloed federal programs, so the question is, do we build a program that deals with the siloed programs, or do we try to break down those silos at the federal level? And we're going to attack it in both places," Lyon said.

Asked if it was realistic to accomplish the DHHS vision by changing how the federal government works, Lyon replied quickly, "Completely realistic."

"We have an obligation - if we see something that can be improved, regardless of where that issue may be, I think . . . states have the obligation to stand up and try to do something," he said.

Lyon said the federal government has "embraced" the ideas presented by the DHHS.

"I am certainly encouraged by how my federal partners have reacted to much of what we're trying to do," he said.

Snyder and the administration have previously mentioned applying for various waivers to cut through federal programming. Lyon said DHHS has been able to get around this through conversations with the feds.

"We've been able to work with the federal government to ask for things without a waiver," he said.

This give-and-take between the state and the federal government was apparent recently when the feds granted approval to a waiver for the Healthy Michigan Plan, which allows Michigan's customized Medicaid expansion program to continue (See "[Feds, State Reach Compromise To Keep Healthy Michigan In Place](#)," 12/17/15).

The final approval appeared to mark a compromise between what is called for in state law regarding the Healthy Michigan Plan, and what the feds wanted preserved in their vision for Medicaid expansion.

State Testing In Flint To Continue: The DHHS role in the state's response to the Flint water crisis has involved testing of children and adults for lead, which became a problem after the city switched its water supply to the Flint River for more than a year.

Lyon touched on the Flint issue briefly, saying the state would continue testing (See "[Bits And Tidbits](#)," 12/11/15).

He said the next priority for the DHHS is "following up and ensuring that children who have elevated blood lead levels, that we are doing everything we can to reduce those blood lead levels."

Feds: State Meeting Marks On Child Welfare Improvements

A federal report released today found that Michigan has met goals set for improving the state's child welfare system.

However, the report won't have any bearing on the ongoing negotiations between the state and an advocacy organization to lift different court-ordered requirements on Michigan's child welfare system.

Today, the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) received a letter from the feds saying the state has achieved all the goals in a federally implemented "program improvement plan."

The state has been working with the U.S. Administration for Children and Families (ACF) since 2009, when federal officials said the state was not in compliance, according to a press release.

Now, the feds say vulnerable children are safer and are finding permanent homes more quickly.

"The successful completion of this program improvement plan is a milestone for both Michigan and ACF," said Rafeal **LOPEZ**, commissioner of the ACF. "It represents dedication and commitment from staff at every level."

In 2008, the state first reached a settlement with the advocacy group Children's Rights, which brought a class action suit against the state regarding its child welfare system.

As a result of the settlement, the DHHS has had to meet a number of objectives through periodic reports delivered to a federal court (See "[Michigan Score On Child Welfare Report Tied to Computer Problems](#)," 4/13/15).

Earlier this year, the state embarked on renegotiating the terms with Children's Rights (See "[State, Advocates To Renegotiate Child Welfare Oversight](#)," 2/20/15).

Those negotiations are still ongoing, and DHHS Director Nick **LYON** described the talks as going "quite well" in a recent interview (See related story).

With the release of this report noting the state's improvements in child welfare, Children's Rights spokesperson Wende Gozan **BROWN** said it wouldn't have any bearing on the negotiations. She said the program improvement plan required by the feds is different.

The state said much of the same, saying the benchmarks met in the ACF plan "do not directly affect" the court oversight.

Asked if this report could gain the state any leverage in its negotiations with Children's Rights, the state said no, because the two issues aren't tied together.

As a result of the ACF letter today, the state is off the hook for at least \$2.8 million in potential federal penalties, which have been rescinded.

Michigan meets, exceeds federal goals for child welfare system

"LANSING, Mich. – Vulnerable Michigan children are safer and are finding permanent homes more quickly through improvements to the state's child welfare system, according to the U.S. Administration for Children and Families (ACF). "

Source: Department of Health and Human Services **Date:** 12-22-2015 **Link:**

http://mirsnews.com/pdfs/Press_Releases/1450721616_dhhs.pdf

Families urged to provide a safe sleep space for baby during holiday travel

"LANSING, Mich. – With the holidays around the corner, it's a busy time of year often spent traveling away from home for visits. For families with babies, travel can be especially hectic and it can be hard to remember all of the necessities. One item to put at the top of your list is a safe space for baby to sleep when you're away from home."

Source: Department of Health and Human Services **Date:** 12-22-2015 **Link:**

http://mirsnews.com/pdfs/Press_Releases/1450714302_dhhs.pdf

Rep Lawrence passes ESEA amendment to benefit foster youth

"WASHINGTON, D.C. – Rep. Brenda Lawrence has passed an amendment requiring the U.S. Secretary of Education to track the educational progress of foster youth in America, a key measure that will protect hundreds of thousands of foster care students across America."

Source: Rep. Brenda Lawrence **Date:** 12-22-2015 **Link:** http://mirsnews.com/pdfs/Press_Releases/1450730611_lawrence.pdf

Thanks,

Sharon