

Health and Human Services Committee
LB 898
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Department of Health and Human Services

Good afternoon Senator Campbell and members of the Health and Human Services Committee. I am Thomas Pristow (T-H-O-M-A-S P-R-I-S-T-O-W) Director of the Division of Children and Family Services of the Department of Health and Human Services. I am here to testify in a neutral position on LB898.

LB898 and a portion of what is proposed in LR400 would expand the information provided to the Legislature through quarterly reports the Department currently provides. I would like to take this opportunity to share with the committee information on what we are currently doing and the improvements ACCESSNebraska has made since October 2013.

As the committee is aware, on September 30, 2013, the service delivery of Economic Assistance and Medicaid benefits through ACCESSNebraska was changed. The Medicaid and Long-Term Care staff and the Children and Family Services staff began performing only the work respective of their areas (Medicaid and Economic Assistance). This is also the date that phone lines were split for each of the Divisions. The Department believes that this split has thus far been very successful.

One improvement that has been achieved as a result of this split is the significant decrease in wait times for clients who are contacting ACCESSNebraska. The average wait time for the month of January for the Division of Children and Family Services was 12 minutes and 31 seconds. The average wait time for the month of January for the Division of Medicaid and Long-Term Care was 9 minutes and 44 seconds. Work task numbers have also decreased in the past few months.

Both Divisions have also improved access for clients through increased staff in local offices across the State and additional assigned caseloads. The Division of Children and Family Services has workers who are assigned a case for a period of time during the application process. The Division of Medicaid and Long-Term Care has ongoing assigned caseloads for specified caseloads. The Divisions are working collaboratively to address common client concerns through joint meetings with Community Partners and frequent communication between the Divisions.

Continuous Quality Improvement has been integrated into ACCESSNebraska and is an important goal for both Divisions. The Division of Children and Family Services has created an interdivisional team that is dedicated to the evaluation of data necessary to improve the quality of service and processes for Economic Assistance benefits. The Division of Medicaid and Long-Term Care has created a Quality of Care team, which assesses the 26 child and 26 adult CMS Health Care Measures and added additional positions that focus on program accuracy and quality assurance activities related to the eligibility determinations.

In addition to the internal work of the Department, the Division of Children and Family Services is working with a consultant through the United States Department of Agriculture-Food and Nutrition Services at no cost to the division. This consultant has been on-site twice since November 2013, and will be working with the Division over the next 18 months. The consultant's objective is to help the Division identify more efficiencies in our daily work, as well as to estimate the average time it takes workers to perform certain tasks during the day. This will help the Division set continued goals for average wait times and realistic work task number goals.

The Department appreciates the dedication of this Committee and the Legislature to the services provided to the citizens of Nebraska. The experience of our citizens in the ACCESSNebraska delivery system for the past few years has been inconsistent and the interest of the Legislature has been understandable. The Department would like to highlight the improvements that have been made in recent months. We firmly believe the Department will continue to make improvements to service delivery in the coming months.

Thank you for the opportunity to be here today. I'm happy to answer any questions you may have.