

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

October 18, 2013

CONTACT

Russ Reno, Communications and Legislative Services, (o) 402-471-8287, (c) 402-450-7318
russ.reno@nebraska.gov

Federal Waiver of Funds Awarded for Project to Serve Children at Home

Lincoln – A five-year program of more than \$153 million in federal and state funds will allow the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services flexibility to develop and provide services to avoid out-of-home placement for children at low-risk for abuse and neglect, said Children and Family Services Director Thomas Pristow.

Nebraska is one of only eight states awarded the program, known as a IV-E waiver, this year, Pristow said. “We are excited about implementing our federally approved project that develops an assessment process to steer resources to families in their home. In addition, the project will use performance-based contracting with service providers to achieve better outcomes for children and families.”

The waiver allows DHHS to use the \$153 million for the project in ways otherwise not allowed by the federal government. Details will be worked out in the coming months, he said. Children and Family Services must implement the project between April 1-Oct. 1, 2014. An initial pilot program will kick off the project in five counties that have yet to be named. Following that, a timeline and criteria for implementation statewide will be developed.

Over the five-year period of the waiver, Children and Family Services will finalize and launch a program called Alternative Response that uses evidence-based practices to assess a family’s strengths and needs and the likelihood of abuse or neglect if children remain at home while receiving services. He said the providers of those services will work under a contract that measures the success of outcomes utilizing an approach called Results-Based Accountability.

The use of the two programs in addressing the needs of children and families who come in contact with the state’s child welfare system was determined to be a good project by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ Children’s Bureau in the Administration for Children and Families, Pristow said.

“Study after study has shown that children experience less trauma and respond better to services when they remain in their home,” said Kerry Winterer, DHHS CEO. “The tie to parents is strong and our demonstration project

aims to build on this fact and serve more children at home with their families. The project we've proposed will help provide more comprehensive services across the state, as well as measure their success. Besides benefitting the families we serve, it also will encourage community development of additional services that help local families."

The funds allowed in the waiver normally would have paid the costs of services for children removed from their home. DHHS began working with consultants on the application in February 2012, Pristow said.

More than seven out of 10 children served by Children and Family Services in 2012 were victims of physical neglect, he said. Currently, for example, a child living in an unsanitary home may be placed out of the home while the situation is handled, which is traumatic for the child. With the demonstration project, the assessment may discover that the child can be safe at home while these issues are addressed. The family could be taken to a hotel overnight and a service could be hired to clean the home. The assessment also may show that the parent has depression issues, and resources would be provided to help the parent with depression and keeping a clean home.

"In this example, when the assessment program identifies children are at a low-risk for abuse or neglect, the child remains with the parent," Pristow said. "Keeping the family together has shown to improve the effectiveness of the services provided and reduces child and family trauma."

The University of Nebraska-Lincoln will evaluate DHHS' project, and report to the Administration for Children and Families in the U.S. HHS.

Last year, the Nebraska Legislature created a committee to provide input to DHHS on the application for a waiver demonstration project, he said.

Title IV-E waiver provides federal matching funds for children in out-of-home care. In 2011, Congress provided U.S. HHS the authority to approve up to 10 IV-E waiver demonstration projects per year over three years. The waivers will provide the opportunity to test child and family interventions at a larger scale and demonstrate what works, the true costs of the interventions, and the impact on child well-being, Pristow said. The waiver applies to certain requirements of titles IV-E and IV-B of the Social Security Act, and project must be cost neutral to the federal government.