

Section 2 Scope of Work and Timelines

1.1. Work to be Conducted.

This work will result in a report to the Vermont Legislature detailing the drivers of variance in Vermont's custody rates over time. Analyses informing the report will explain why custody rates have varied over time in Vermont. These analyses will consider the influences of policies, programs, casework practices, and other practices or conditions that are presumed to prevent or influence foster care placement.

The effort will not be focused exclusively on Department of Children Families (DCF) practices and activities but designed to tap the entire ecosystem of child welfare and well-being that may influence custody outcomes. This will allow for an assessment of the role of preventative engagement with the schools, families, and communities that Vermont's children live in each day. Input will also be sought from the Judiciary and Guardian Ad Litem system.

The examination will be designed with a tight focus on variance in custody rates in Vermont over time, rather than a comparative study across states. Analyses conducted will focus on children ages birth through 18 years by three age cohorts (likely 0-6, 6-12 and 12-18 years old) who come into contact with the DCF Family Services Child Welfare system.

Phase 1

- *Component A: Comprehensive literature review. The academic literature will provide rigorous, evidence-based insight into correlates, causes, and preventative best practices over time and across settings. The results of this review can be compared to the inventory of services, interventions, and activities in Vermont.*
- *Component B: Track a representative sample of individual children by the three age cohorts who have had some level of contact with the DCF. The experiences of these children will be detailed (through case plans, case notes, and other documents) to provide an inventory of each child's exposure to interventions, preventative measures, services, and agencies, designed to ensure child welfare and safety. Outcomes of each child's DCF contact (e.g., no additional action, referral, custody, etc.) will be tied to the experience profiles that emerge from this analysis. The results will allow for a rich, qualitative, case-based assessment of how patterns of circumstance, experience, exposure, and possible intervention shape outcomes and custody decisions.*

Phase 1 Timelines

Contractor will provide at least two project status updates by phone or in person meetings, the dates for the status updates will be set by mutual agreement of the parties between October 1 and December 31, 2019.

Draft report delivered by January 31, 2020 and Contractor shall be available for a minimum of two days for testimony to the Legislature between February 1 and April 30, 2020.

Phase 2

- *Quantitative analysis of custody rates over time. Using administrative data from DCF (and possibly other agencies), this analysis will catalog the personal and family characteristics of children having any DCF contact over 20 years or to the extent possible. The analysis will also include an inventory of each child's exposure to interventions, preventative measures, services, and agencies, designed to ensure child welfare and safety. Predictive models will reveal how the influence of various factors may change across time. This component of the work will also consider the role of community-based service providers and changes in the state policy context as well as variations in the state's economic, demographic, and political condition over time.*

Phase 2 Timelines

Contractor will provide at least one Phase 2 project status update by phone or in person meetings by March 31, 2020.

Final report delivered by July 15, 2020 and Contractor shall be available for a minimum of two days for testimony to the Legislature subsequent to the delivery of the final report.

This work will be reliant on the ability to access data held by DCF and other state agencies. Aspects of the scope of work and timelines may require amendment based on mutual agreement of the parties once the technical questions regarding the accessibility; reliability; comprehensiveness; and consistency of this data are resolved.

- 1.2. **Format of Deliverables.** For the Draft and Final Reports as outlined in in Sec. 2.1 Scope of Work, deliverables will be submitted to the State in one (1) hard copy plus electronic media, as applicable. There shall be no proprietary information or trade secrets in any deliverable unless preapproved by the State.

ATTACHMENT B: ENACTED LANGUAGE

Act 720 (H.5426) of the 2019 Session

An Act Relating to Making Appropriations for the Support of Government

Sec. C.116 2019 Acts and Resolves No. 6, Sec. 88 is amended to read:

**Sec. 88. FISCAL YEAR 2019 ONE-TIME APPROPRIATIONS AND
TRANSFERS FROM THE GENERAL FUND**

(a) The following appropriations are made from the General Fund in fiscal year 2019:

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(6) To the Joint Fiscal Office: \$275,000 to be allocated ~~as follows for the following studies that will be comprehensively defined in the fiscal year 2020 budget process:~~

(A) ~~\$250,000 to be reserved to fund contracted for~~ research and findings to identify and examine the factors contributing to Vermont's high rate of children entering the custody of the State. Such research shall study the preventive and upstream services and interventions provided to families and the extent to which these supports to families have demonstrated effectiveness in allowing children to remain with their families. Policy recommendations resulting from this research are intended to inform funding decisions regarding these services to ensure the safety of Vermont's vulnerable children and to enhance the long-term stability and well-being of these families.

(i) The Joint Fiscal Office is authorized to enter into a direct contract with the University of Vermont in lieu of a bid process. In the event that such a contract takes place, the payments shall be made in intervals of: twenty-five percent (25%) upon signing; thirty percent (30%) to be paid after approval of a final work plan by the Chairs of the House and Senate Committees on Appropriations, the House Committee on Human Services, and the Senate Committee on Health and Welfare Committee; thirty percent (30%) on agreed upon mid-contract term project status report or presentation; and fifteen percent (15%) upon report completion and presentation to the Legislature on or before January 30, 2020.

(ii) The Agency of Human Services and the Department for Children and Families shall execute memoranda and provide available data in a reasonably timely fashion and in a manner consistent with any State and federal requirements as needed for this research project.

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