

VCAB
Vermont Citizen's Advisory Board
to the
VT Department for Children and Families

September 29, 2021

Secretary Mike Smith
Vermont Agency of Human Services
280 State Drive - Center Building
Waterbury, VT 05671-1080

Dear Secretary Smith:

Vermont's Citizens Advisory Board (VCAB) was established by the federal Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act of 1988. Since then, VCAB has supported the work of DCF and advocated for systemic improvements. For over a decade, VCAB has acknowledged the ways in which Vermont's antiquated data system interferes with its ability to achieve best practices.

DCF's data system was launched in the early 1980s, prior to the launch of the world wide web. Vermont has been asking our DCF Family Services staff to use 11 separate systems and 30+ Excel spreadsheets to support their work and reporting requirements. We know that this practice is time intensive, increases the likelihood of human error, and is cumbersome. We also know that the lack of a comprehensive data system that communicates across silos disadvantages us and the children, youth, and caregivers in our child welfare system. We are currently unable to speak confidently about trends in outcomes for the system that is responsible for the well-being of some of Vermont's most vulnerable children and youth.

Deputy Commissioner Radke was asked to provide a status update during the June, 2021 VCAB meeting. In that update, she reported:

"In May of 2016, the federal government issued revised data systems requirements to state child welfare systems that wanted to update their current data systems. In response, 45 out of 50 states in the nation have now declared they have implemented or are now planning implementation of a new system, known as the Comprehensive Child Welfare Information System (CCWIS). Vermont is not among them, and FSD's need for a new database system, and the consequences of not having one are looming large."

During our September VCAB meeting, Commissioner Brown shared the wonderful news that there are plans to begin the first module of the data system update. As a group, we want to express our gratitude for this investment. That said, this is a first step which only begins to meet the IT needs of the Department.

VCAB strongly encourages the administration to prioritize a comprehensive data system for DCF. This should include an incremental update of the full data system, which will allow us to


take advantage of the matching federal dollars, and will set us up for the implementation of the Families First Prevention Services Act.

VCAB respectfully requests:

- Commitment to using the \$2 million dollars set aside for the first module of the data system in the carry forward section of the FY22 budget.
- Including the next module of the data system in the FY23 budget.
- Community input on ways in which a system can be developed to increase stakeholder communication and benefit current practice.

VCAB deeply appreciates your attention to this issue and looks forward to partnering with you on this project.

On behalf for the Vermont Citizens Advisory Board, per a vote taken on September 1, 2021,


James Metz, MD, Co-Chair


Sally Borden, M.Ed., Co-Chair

Cc: Sean Brown, Commissioner
Aryka Radke, Deputy Commissioner
Vermont Legislative Child Protection Oversight Committee, Sen. Ginny Lyons Chair