

October 15, 2003

TO: The Honorable Mark R. Warner
and
The General Assembly of Virginia

The Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS) is required by the 2003 Appropriations Act, Item 360 K, to report by October 15 of each year on the status of efforts to develop and implement an automated system for the child care assistance programs. This status report details VDSS' efforts to develop an automated system for the Child Care Program.

BACKGROUND

The Child Care Program has grown significantly over the past decade. Expenditures have increased from approximately \$9 million in state fiscal year (SFY) 1989 to over \$140 million in SFY 2003. In SFY 2003, child care assistance was provided to 55,497 children. The Child Care Program is one of the largest assistance programs administered by VDSS.

Case and client information for the Child Care Program currently resides in the Virginia Client Information System (VACIS), a system developed in the early 1980s. A MAPPER-based application called the Interim Child Care (ICC) system that accounts for expenditures and counts of children and families served has also been developed. With the current automation, Virginia is able to provide limited data on the demographics of families served.

A fully automated child care system will improve state program management by allowing analyses of encumbrances and expenditures, assessment of unmet child care needs and provision of timely information regarding children and families served, providers utilized, and costs associated with child care. In addition, local departments of social services will have data with which to assess their local programs, make comparisons to other localities and manage their Child Care Program's operations and expenditures. Development of an automated system for the Child Care Program is a priority for VDSS.

CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS

Beginning in February 2003, 16 automated management reports have been made available for state and local use. Data from the ICC system and VACIS are collected to produce these management reports. The reports provide statistics on program codes and budget lines for children served through the Child Care Program. They provide a breakdown of the ages of the children served and data on the type of placements in which the children are receiving care. Unduplicated counts of families and children served are also available. The reports are available by month and are sorted by locality, region and/or state. As VDSS moves forward with the automation of the Child Care Program, these reports will be incorporated.

In addition, a project manager position designated to provide overall managerial guidance to the Child Care Automation Project team has been filled. This position is critical for the successful development of a child care automation system. Under the direction of the project manager, the following efforts toward evaluating and obtaining a comprehensive child care system have been made during the past year:

- The Child Care Users' Group has finalized overall system requirements for a comprehensive child care automated system, using the Child Care Electronic Environment: a System Automation Worktool (CEE: SAW) as a guide. The Child Care Bureau (CCB) of the United States Department of Health and Human Services' (HHS) Administration for Children and Families (ACF) developed CEE: SAW as a baseline design to guide states' development and adaptation of automated systems used in the administration of child care subsidy programs.
- The Child Care Users' Group has evaluated existing child care systems, including systems developed in other states and commercially available software packages, to determine the availability of viable vendors.
- The Child Care Users' Group requested that interfaces with other VDSS' systems be implemented prior to executing the overall application of a child care system. Efforts are underway to research and explore options to facilitate communication between current VDSS state systems.
- The research and documentation necessary to incorporate interfaces of all the state's social services systems are progressing in collaboration with VITA (Virginia Information Technologies Agency). VITA is providing system oversight, guidance and assistance in locating vendors to meet the system's communication mandate as well as providing a standard for state procurement. VDSS' partnership with VITA will strengthen any automation efforts.

- Research and evaluation of the Child Care Program's automation is included within VDSS' Information Technology (IT) Strategic Plan. The Child Care Program's automation project is one of VDSS' major automation efforts that have been reported to VITA.

SUMMARY

VDSS continues to pursue obtaining and providing a comprehensive automated system to manage the Child Care Program. The Child Care Program is critical to the goal of serving low-income families, strengthening families and helping them toward self-sufficiency. A fully automated system for the Child Care Program will allow for both state and local management needs; improve the ability to analyze encumbrances and expenditures; and provide timely information regarding families served, providers utilized, and the costs of child care. As VDSS moves forward with its strategic IT plan, the automation of the Child Care Program provides an opportunity to facilitate greater coordination with other state agencies, local government and existing VDSS systems.

Sincerely,

Maurice A. Jones
Commissioner