COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES

October 15, 2005

TO: The Honorable Mark R. Warner

           and

           The Honorable Vincent F. Callahan, Jr., Chair
           House Appropriations Committee

           and

           The Honorable John H. Chichester, Chair
           Senate Finance Committee

Study Mandate

This status report is submitted pursuant to the 2005 Appropriations Act, Item 362 J, which establishes the intent of the General Assembly to automate the child care program. Item 362 J requires that:

"The Virginia Department of Social Services shall report to the Governor and the General Assembly by October 15 of each year regarding the status of such automation, system adequacy, and needed actions."

Background

The child care subsidy program is one of the largest assistance programs administered by the Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS). It has grown significantly over the past decade, with expenditures increasing from approximately $9 million in State Fiscal Year (SFY) 1989 to over $161 million in SFY 2005. In SFY 2005, child care assistance was provided to over 61,000 children. Steps have been taken toward a comprehensive automated system to support the program; however, comprehensive automation is not yet fully operational. Without full automation, providing timely program data in an efficient manner is difficult.

Automation to support this major program has been limited. Case and client information is contained in the Virginia Client Information System (VACIS), a system developed in the early 1980s. The present Interim Child Care System is a MAPPER-based application that tracks expenditures and counts of children and families served.

Automation for the child care program is not currently part of either of VDSS' two major systems that support local programs, Application Benefit Delivery Automation Project (ADAPT) or On-line Automated Services Information System (OASIS). ADAPT is the system for TANF, Food Stamps, and, in the future, other eligibility programs. OASIS is currently supporting foster care, adoptions, child protective services and in the future, is planned to support other child welfare and adult service programs.

Current Developments

The VDSS has moved forward in providing monthly child care program reports to both state and local agency users via the local department of social services web site. The program reports contain data on individual program codes, budget lines for children served through subsidies, and a breakdown of the ages and types of placements children receive in care. Statistical reports on counts of families and children served, expenditure information and child care exception reports are also available. In May, 2004, VDSS began publishing service-based VACIS reports to the local departments of social services web site. This conversion from print to internet access provides immediate access to client information for the local user and saves an estimated $50,000 per year in printing costs for the state.

The Child Care Project, VDSS' project for automating the child care program, continues to make progress in satisfying child care user requirements:

- In preparation for implementing the Child Care Project as part of a department-wide consolidated system, the following actions have taken place:

  - A consultant was hired to gather multiple user requirements and provide leadership in the development of a simplified sign-on across multiple systems. This effort assisted in the development of an in-house application for a single customer ID across multiple systems as a component of the Child Care Project. This interface, Systems Partnering in a Demographic Repository (SPIDeR), will allow the 120 local departments of social services, VDSS staff and more than 25 Community Action Programs to see all the cases that a client has with VDSS. The interface will reduce the number of sign-ons that workers have to enter in order to access various applications and it will reduce data entry, improve data quality and increase productivity. SPIDeR will use a master customer ID database that will make it possible to find the same individuals across multiple systems in one concise data view. It will allow viewing of the composite records and it will move the agency closer toward the goal of having an integrated social services delivery system.

- VDSS has made progress in the exploration of a generic repository for fiscal information as a component of the Child Care Project.

- Data held in the Division of Licensing Programs automated system is now available on the public web site and will be incorporated into the Child Care Project.

- The Waiting List for Child Care has been automated and implemented in the local social service agencies. At any given time, the locality and the state office are able to see the numbers of families and children awaiting subsidy assistance.

- An additional report has been developed and is provided monthly to the local social service agencies to assist them in the management of child care funds for their locality. This report is fiscal year driven and provides an accounting of the funds expended for each budget line.

- The research and documentation necessary to incorporate interfaces of all the state social services systems is progressing in collaboration with the Virginia Information Technologies Agency (VITA). VITA is providing system oversight, guidance and assistance in locating vendors to meet the system communication mandate as well as providing a standard for state procurement. The VDSS is currently reviewing Public-Private Education Facilities and Infrastructure Act (PPEA) proposals with the Child Care Project in mind.

- Research and evaluation of the Child Care Project automation is included within VDSS' Information Technology Strategic Plan. The Child Care Project is one of two major VDSS initiatives that have been promoted to VITA. The VDSS will pursue automation through its partnership with VITA.

- A Child Care Project Request for Information (RFI) was developed in cooperation with VITA. The RFI included high level requirements as part of VDSS' overall automation needs as well as detailed requirements for the Child Care Program. While information from vendors was obtained, this effort was paused as VDSS moves toward Business Process Re-Engineering. The re-structuring of the business of social services will impact any effort to automate benefits and services delivered in the Commonwealth.

Summary

A fully automated child care system will improve state program management, allowing analysis of encumbrances and expenditures, assessment of unmet child care subsidy needs and timely information regarding children and families served. It will also document providers utilized and costs associated with child care. In addition, local departments of social services will have data with which to assess local programs, make comparisons to other localities

and manage their child care program operations and expenditures. The Department continues its support to obtain and provide a comprehensive child care automated system to manage the child care program, as well as to provide the framework for a Department-wide integrated system. The VDSS is working closely with VITA to promote the Child Care Project and to ensure that automation efforts are a part of the department's integrated system.

Respectfully submitted,

Anthony Conyers, Jr.
Commissioner