

My name is Shirley Tiernan. I am a mostly retired social worker. From 1983 until 2003, I worked for DPHHS, CFSD (under its several identities and names). I was a CPS social worker in Ravalli County and Missoula County, Supervised in Missoula and Mineral Counties, regional Administrator for 17 counties in Eastern Montana and Bureau Chief for Training for CFSD. Last year I supervised investigation in Missoula County for 3 months while the supervisor was taking maternity leave.

This and other committees, boards, teams and investigatory entities have spent considerable time, effort and money looking at Montana's Child Protection system, almost always due to citizens' complaints to legislators or the Governor or law suits against CFSD.

Citizens appear before you stating the ways that CFSD workers, supervisors, administrators have denied them their rights, removed their children without cause, shirked their responsibilities (or overstepped their legal responsibilities), in short the message has consistently been, "Montana's Child Protection Agency does not do a good job.

I know that you as elected officials need to look carefully at an agency that is responsible for protecting children. I am glad that you do. However, How many times does this type of "looking at" need to happen before we understand where much of the problem lies??

Child & Family Services Division needs more field staff and more adequate funding if they are to adequately accomplish the enormous and important task of protecting children from abuse and neglect, assisting children's parents in gaining a better ability to care for their children, helping drug addicted parents and sometimes children to overcome their addictions, supporting and supervising foster families and reporting required information to the Federal Government. As a CPS social worker, I often had to decide whether to document information from my most recent investigation or visit with a child and or the child's family--or--to "go out" on the investigation that a supervisor or someone had put on my desk. If the new investigation met the criteria for emergent, I left immediately. If it wasn't an emergency, I may have done some rudimentary documentation of the

last encounter and waited until the next day or few days to investigate the new report. In the past several years, I know that there are reports of possible child abuse or neglect that do not meet the criteria for "priority 1" (Critical), that do not get investigated for a week or more.

The reasons for this delay are almost always the fact that workers have too many investigation responsibilities and too little time. In my many years with CPS, I have known of possibly 4 - 5 workers and/or supervisors who simply were not able or willing to live up to the great responsibility of protecting children. I have however, known many workers, supervisors and administrative assistants who have come to work early, left late, skipped lunch, gone out on an investigation at 5:15 p.m. and taking an abused or neglected child or children to the local fast-food for supper while the social worker frantically called several foster homes to find an emergency placement.

During my 20+ years in Child Protection, it seems to me that it has been and continues to be, popular and newsworthy to criticize, admonish, investigate, punish and reorganize Montana's child protection system.

Current complaints include **CENTRAL INTAKE: CI workers are not well-trained, sometimes rude. The phone rings many times before a reporter gets connected to a CI worker. WORKERS DO NOTHING AFTER A REPORT IS MADE: children are left in neglectful and abusive homes. WORKERS REMOVE CHILDREN FROM PERFECTLY ADEQUATE HOMES BECAUSE THEY DO NOT LIKE THE PARENTS.**

In my opinion, this is what CFSD needs:

Additional social workers and possibly social service aides in understaffed offices. Reports could be investigated quicker, children could be visited more frequently, parents and workers could meet more frequently to discuss treatment plans, documentation of work could be accomplished in a timely manner.

Designated attorneys, hired and supervised by the State (AG's office) to handle CAN cases. Currently, due to lack of attorney time in Missoula County, over \$100,000 a month in IVE reimbursement is

being lost due to court orders not getting done in time to meet the federal permanency hearing requirements. In some areas of the state, permanency hearings are being accomplished on time. In larger, urban areas such as Missoula, this is a problem.

Training: My experience is that initial training for social workers is good. It is called MCAN. Montana Child Abuse and neglect training. It is a total of 8 full days of intensive training in all aspects of CPS. It occurs every 3 months, a total of 4 times each year. Before a new worker attends MCAN, his or her supervisor is responsible for in-office training. Each supervisor and new worker has a list of topics and tasks that are to be completed and signed.

On-going for social workers and other staff has in the past been unaffordable due to staff time away from the office and lack of funding. On-going, relevant training keeps staff informed, interested and professionally competent.

Foster Care: The children who are removed from their parents due to serious abuse and/or neglect are increasingly difficult to care for. frequently there have been many reports on a family before there is a substantiation of abuse or neglect. In my opinion, this is often due to a worker not investigating in a timely manner (too many investigations). Meth, alcohol and other drugs affect children in users families, more kids are diagnosed as hyperactive, learning delayed and angry in drug-addicted families. Almost all foster families take foster kids because they care and want to help. However, they do want and deserve to be adequately paid and supported. This does not always happen for the reasons stated above--lack of adequate staff, time and money.

I'll be glad to answer questions. Thank you for your time. I hope that each of you will make and take the time to visit your local CFSD office and talk with folks. (please let them know you're coming, they're busy)

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