

Children's Rights

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<https://www.childrensrights.org/press-release/childrens-rights-calls-for-transparency-in-massachusetts-child-welfare/>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

National Advocacy Organization Uses Public Records Law to Seek Information on Foster Care

(Boston, MA) Childrens Rights the national advocacy organization that since 2010 has been pushing to reform Massachusetts foster care for thousands of kids is now seeking to ensure the states Department of Children and Families (DCF) is more transparent.

Late yesterday Childrens Rights used the Commonwealths Public Records Law to request a list of DCF management reports detailing the states recent performance in areas where the department has historically struggled.

The reports cover critical topics such as: how many children workers are responsible for; how often kids are being visited by their caseworkers; the number of foster homes with past due licensing approvals, reassessments or renewals; and the percentage of kids receiving timely medical screenings in foster care. Although other reports are available on DCFs website, the department does not routinely publicize statistics on these crucial areas.

Right now DCF is far from transparent. If state leaders are serious about making foster care the safe haven that children deserve, it is imperative that they be open and honest about how kids are faring, said Sara Bartosz, lead counsel at Childrens Rights. We encourage DCF to post key performance data to its website, so the public can help to hold the system accountable.

The records request comes on the heels of an Office of the Child Advocate (OCA) report released this week containing troubling findings and recommendations for improvement to longstanding systemic deficiencies. According to the report, in 2014 OCA reviewed 290 supported allegations of abuse or neglect concerning 184 children in DCF custody. In its report, OCA also calls for a more comprehensive and integrated process for authorizing and overseeing psychotropic medication for children in DCF custody.

The states high rate of maltreatment in care and large percentage of foster children prescribed psychotropic medications were highlighted in *Connor B. v. Patrick*. The lawsuit, filed in 2010 by Childrens Rights and Boston law firm Nutter McClennan & Fish LLP, alleged that DCF violates the constitutional rights of children in state care by placing them in dangerous and unstable situations.

Childrens Rights is deeply concerned that problems that were catalysts to our 2010 lawsuit still have not been cured, said Bartosz. There is no doubt that the Baker administration inherited a broken, dysfunctional system, but these children deserve accountability. Childrens Rights remains dedicated to the thousands of kids relying on the state to ensure their safety and well-being.

Although U.S. District Judge William Young ruled that the deficiencies of the system did not warrant injunctive relief, in his 2013 opinion he wrote that DCF has failed not only to comport with national standards of care and state and federal requirements but also its own internal policies for protecting and supporting children in foster care. He also noted a well-documented laundry list of problems plaguing DCF in areas including maltreatment in care, the inappropriate placement of children, providing medical services and caseload management and training.

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