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DCS REACHES COMPLIANCE IN ALL BRIAN A. PROVISIONS Achievement Marks Complete Overhaul of Tennessee's Foster-Care System

Nashville – In a long-awaited milestone, the Tennessee Department of Children's Services has achieved all 136 provisions set forth in the Brian A. consent decree, according to an order signed today in U.S. District Court.

The agreed order from U.S. District Court Judge Todd J. Campbell means that DCS is "in maintenance" with the requirements of Brian A. The department must maintain this level of performance through the end of 2016 before it can finally exit the federal consent decree.

"I'm elated by what we've accomplished, but the work doesn't stop," said DCS Commissioner Bonnie Hommrich. "We will sustain what we have achieved, and we will continue to improve. Nothing changes. Today, tomorrow and going forward, we will remain focused on providing quality care to children and families."

Working closely with the plaintiffs, Children's Rights Inc., and the Technical Assistance Committee, which serves as both a support to the department and as a monitor for the federal court, DCS has essentially built a new statewide foster system over the past 15 years.

Many of the improvements have been in place for several years now. Today's order recognizes that all of the new systems are delivering as intended.

"Public child welfare is incredibly complicated, and we will never be perfect," said Commissioner Hommrich. "But today's achievement validates all of the hard work by so many. It's a tribute especially to our dedicated staff members, who often perform in difficult, contentious and heartbreaking circumstances. I'm very proud of them. They deserve our thanks and praise.

"We also want to acknowledge the countless community partners who work tirelessly every day to support and protect vulnerable families and children," Hommrich said.

Under Brian A., DCS emphasizes family-like settings for children who come into state care. It works hard to keep sibling groups together. It focuses on getting kids to permanency as quickly and safely as possible.

Among the improvements designed to achieve those goals:

- A high performing child abuse hotline
- A well-trained and resourced child protective services workforce
- A dedicated staff of foster-care and adoption staff committed to high-quality services for the children they serve
- A strong foster-home system
- An emphasis on family placements, rather than institutional settings, for children in foster care
- A workforce development program that includes salary improvements, a reduction in caseload ratios and a stipend program for social workers pursuing their degrees
- A sophisticated provider network that delivers an array of services for foster children
- A well-being staff of nurses, therapists and educational specialists
- Performance-based contracting that rewards outcomes, not how many days foster children stay in care.
- A state-of-the-art information system, TFACTS
- A statewide staff of attorneys who specialize in public-child welfare law
- A strong relationship with the University of Chicago's Chapin Hall, a national leader in delivering the performance monitoring tools critical to DCS' continuing success
- A wide range of partnerships, such as Casey Family Programs, the Tennessee Commission on Children and Youth, Blue Select, the Tn. Department of Health and Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services
- A robust quality assurance program
- Child and family teaming. For each child in custody, DCS case managers establish a team of family members and supporters to get the children safe, healthy and back on track.
- A child death review process, modeled on similar systems in aviation and health care, that identifies better ways to keep children safe

The department continues to innovate. Evidence from around the country indicates that in many cases, it is better for children, birth families and foster families -- and more cost-effective for the government -- to offer intensive services in the home. Tennessee is participating in a new federal waiver program that encourages states to reduce custody times safely and effectively.

Today, Tennessee has 6,815 children in state custody who are covered by the Brian A. provisions.