

Complaint Process Summary Report for the 66th L.J. Compliance Report.

During the reporting period of January 1st, 2021 to June 30, 2021, the Child Welfare Team received a total of 47 L.J. class member complaints. The pool of complaints included cases where Custody and Guardianship had been previously granted, resulting in these youth to no longer be class members, but we felt that it was important to include these in this summary as stated below.

During this reporting period it is important to note that BCDSS made several changes in our tracking and monitoring of these complaints. These changes ensured better monitoring and follow through, resulting in the complaints remaining open in our tracking system until each was resolved. As an example, if the complaint was about a payment not being received by a provider, we did not consider the complaint closed until the provider received that payment. Another improvement occurring during this reporting period was that all of the Child Welfare Complaints, whether involving a LJ Class Member or not, are now being tracked by the Executive Assistant to the Assistant Deputy Director of Child Welfare. This change in procedure created a single point of contact for the keeping of all complaints, access to them by Program Managers and real time updates on the resolution of the complaint as it is being addressed.

The major themes of the various complaints received during this reporting period can be broken down into three separate categories being: payments not being received, COVID related concerns and communication issues.

The largest number of complaints received were in the category of various types of payments. These accounted for 18 of the 47 inquiries received during this reporting period. Of the 18 complaints received, many involved families with multiple children. These complaints were voiced by either caregivers or Children's Attorneys on the behalf of caregivers. The complaints included not receiving foster care stipends, daycare payments, subsidy payments and one complaint about a delay in receiving reimbursement for clothing for a youth. Since the LJ Team noticed an increase in this category of complaints, we modified our approach in resolving them. The Program Manager for Court Process held Staffings within 72 hours of receiving this type of complaint. The staff in attendance included a member from finance as well as a members of the permanency or custody and guardianship team. This process enables us to immediately troubleshoot the breakdown in the issuance of the payment and further enables us to identify next steps as a team, so that payment can be generated and distributed as soon as possible. As an example, a system breakdown was identified in payments in Custody and Guardianship cases where caregiver addresses were not accurately migrating from Chessie to CJAMS. In addition to the immediate staffing solution, another area of improvement in the system of payment occurred in cases where BCDSS finance rather than the Comptroller's office in Annapolis was providing the payment checks, by having BCDSS case managers hand deliver the checks to prevent any additional delay.

Of the 47 Complaints received 11 involved COVID concerns and visitation. One of the recurring issues raised by both relative and non relative caregivers was that in some situations,

they no longer felt comfortable supervising visitation and having to enforce wearing masks, particularly if the visits occurred inside. As a result, many of these caregivers requested that BCDSS supervise these visits. As a result of these complaints a system was devised to use the Banja and Biddle Street visitation centers for the visits to occur. In addition, BCDSS received other complaints around the pivot from in person to virtual visitation, due to COVID exposure or COVID positive cases, and the time frame in which it would pivot back to in person

The third major category of complaints during this reporting period fall under the umbrella of communication issues. The majority of these inquiries were received from Children's Attorneys and these complaints included items such as failure to receive change of placement notification and failure to receive timely responses to emails or requests to schedule FTDMS. Additionally, there were some instances where youth in the Ready by 21 unit complained through the Foster Youth Ombudsman about not being included in case planning or failure of case managers to respond to requests by the youth. In investigating the complaints received involving youth not receiving responses from their case managers, it was common to find that the youth reached out to the case manager during non-working hours including weekends. Often the investigation determined that the case manager did respond appropriately and timely under the circumstances. To improve the issues around communication, BCDSS leadership has been stressing the importance of communication all the way down the chain of command especially with the supervisors. Furthermore, when communications and inquiries are received from Children's Attorneys there has been a positive change in the response process to include collaboration between BCDSS legal and the case managers in providing timely and appropriate responses.

BCDSS will continue to track Complaints and implement ways to improve services to the children, youth and families that we serve. We will continue to look for common trends and ways to implement system wide improvements through the complaints and inquiries we receive.