

From: Spears, Linda (DCF)
Sent: Monday, December 11, 2017 10:41 AM
To: DSS-DL - Internal Users
Subject: Note from Gov. Charlie Baker

To DCF Team Members –

I assume the report released by the State Auditor last week took your breath away. It felt that way to the rest of us, too. Honestly, I was dismayed to see the Auditor put out an audit that relied on data that was 2-3 years old and talk about it like it happened yesterday – especially when everyone knows so much has changed at DCF since the fall of 2015.

Did DCF have issues in 2014 and 2015? Yes. Is our work to improve how we look after these children finished? Of course not. That work never ends. Whenever you talk about working in a system that looks after 50,000 children in the midst of all kinds of incredibly difficult and complicated life and family situations, we are always striving to improve.

I appreciate that the Auditor also cares about ensuring these children are safe.

But for this report to ignore nearly everything you have done for the past two and a half years to improve the agency's ability to do its work strikes me as wrong. It is not a secret - \$100 MM in new funding, 350 additional social workers, a staffed medical and clinical team to work with front line social workers, a dramatic upgrade in licensed social workers (from the 50's to almost 100%), reductions in caseloads, new policies around 51A investigations, staff supervision and intake, new technology for social workers, a regional office added west of Worcester County, and a host of other initiatives.

At a minimum, it would be fair to say that the DCF of 2017/2018 is nothing like the DCF of 2014/2015. Nothing.

I was also disappointed the report did not include any observations or commentary from frontline social workers. Many of the most valuable insights I've picked up over the years about what works and what doesn't have come from discussions and meetings with the folks who are working with these kids and families every single day.

Third, the report implies and the Auditor's press release makes an explicit claim – in the present tense – that DCF team members routinely do not report assaults on children under the care and protection of DCF to law enforcement. This is simply not true. The incidents from 2014 and 2015 that she alleges were left unreported were, in fact, referred to law enforcement. All of them.

Stating that “victimization of children in DCF's care continues to occur unnoticed by the agency” when the data sets the Auditor uses are two and three years old is not just unfortunate and inaccurate – it's irresponsible.

Finally, as a former Secretary of Health of Human Services, former CEO

of a very large multi-specialty medical group, and former CEO of the nation's highest ranked health plan, I am very skeptical of the Auditor's focus on claims data as a primary tool to spot child abuse. It is administrative billing information, not clinical information – and anyone in health care will tell you it can be misleading if it's used for the wrong purpose. But more importantly, it is old – usually between 3 and 6 months old. We all know that the most important time to investigate any assault on a child is immediately upon discovery of an injury, abuse or neglect. That's why DCF relies on the eyes and ears of Mandated Reporters – doctors, nurses, Emergency Room professionals, teachers, child care workers, school administrators, and police officers, to name a few – to report allegations of child abuse and neglect. It is also why DCF reaches out and trains these mandated reporters about the telltale signs of abuse and how to report it.

It's important to note that the Auditor's report also calls for DCF to continue to focus on improving the dialogue and the outreach with our communities that deal with these kids every day – including the folks in law enforcement. I would agree that is a far more effective strategy than focusing on claims data. Are there opportunities to use claims data as a secondary information tool? Maybe – we will look into that – but the idea that this is better than continuing to double down on the folks who see these kids and know them better than anyone is incorrect.

Let me close by saying something you already know. You do some of the most important work in state government – you worry about, serve and protect at-risk children. It's as simple – and as difficult – as that. We will always be held to a very high standard, and we should always be open to hearing from others, learning from our mistakes and incorporating critical observation into the way we do our work. But in this case, the work you have done and the improvements you have pursued were not reflected in this audit. You have made tremendous strides over the past couple of years, and I want you to know that we know that, and we appreciate it.

Sincerely,

Charlie Baker