INTERIM STUDY PROPOSAL 2015-145

REQUESTING THAT THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL REFER TO THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON AGING, CHILDREN AND YOUTH, LEGISLATIVE AND MILITARY AFFAIRS AN INTERIM STUDY TO CONDUCT A FISCAL AND LEGISLATIVE ANALYSIS REGARDING IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS CONTAINED IN THE JULY 6, 2015, REVIEW OF THE DIVISION OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES CONDUCTED BY THE CHILD WELFARE POLICY AND PRACTICE GROUP CONCERNING CHILD WELFARE IN ARKANSAS.

WHEREAS, the Child Welfare Policy and Practice Group recently made several recommendations to the Division of Children and Family Services to address the challenges present in the Arkansas child welfare system in order to significantly improve outcomes for families and children; and

WHEREAS, the Child Welfare Policy and Practice Group made the following recommendations based on the review of division policy and procedure, agency performance and trend data, internal studies, and external stakeholder input:

(1) Designate a staff member in the Governor's office to coordinate interagency planning and system collaboration for children, youth, and family services;

(2) Build the capacity of the division to partner with stakeholders;

(3) Address the placement challenge;

(4) Create a county-central office task force to address administrative flexibility;

(5) Improve the working relationship between the division and the Administrative Office of Courts;

(6) Expedite the process for filling staff vacancies at the division;

(7) Develop and implement a principle-based operational model of practice for the division;

(8) Strengthen the practice of the division in assessing safety assessment and engagement skills;

(9) Expand the availability of intensive home- and community-based mental health services;

(10) Develop a three-year plan to reduce the division caseloads to an average of twenty (20); and

(11) Determine responsibility for implementing recommendations; and

WHEREAS, the division is at the intersection of a growing foster-care population, worker caseloads of nearly twice the national standard, and an insufficient number of foster-home and relative placements; and

WHEREAS, a fiscal and legislative analysis regarding the implementation of these child welfare recommendations will further our state's goal of protecting children in Arkansas,

NOW THEREFORE,
BE IT PROPOSED BY THE ARKANSAS LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL OF THE NINETIETH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF ARKANSAS:

THAT the Legislative Council refer to the House Committee on Aging, Children and Youth, Legislative and Military Affairs an interim study to conduct a fiscal and legislative analysis regarding the implementation of recommendations contained in the July 6, 2015, review of the Division of Children and Family Services conducted by the Child Welfare Policy and Practice Group concerning child welfare in Arkansas.

Respectfully submitted,

Representative David Meeks
District 70

By: SRC/BAT