

Child well-being

HENNEPIN COUNTY MINNESOTA

Help us keep children safe

The path toward safer children is focusing on their well-being. That means identifying at-risk families earlier and providing practical help to prevent maltreatment or neglect from happening in the first place.

During 2015 and 2016, the Hennepin County Child Protection Oversight Committee heard testimony from staff, providers and the general public to help them understand the barriers and limitations around keeping kids safe and developed core recommendations to guide child protection.

Additional state resources are needed to leverage the county's investment in a pilot program that can be replicated for better outcomes for kids and families across the state. The 3-year state-county pilot will test, evaluate and spread reforms in Hennepin County. Those learnings will develop a new Minnesota Model that produces better outcomes for youth, families, and the fiscal viability of the State Child protection system. The pilot will move from a reactionary, crisis-driven system to focused reforms based on proven models that:

- Identify high risk youth and families
- Provide supports and early interventions (e.g. housing, employment training, chemical and mental health treatment and services, etc.)
- Reduce the overall volume and spending in child protection.

A crisis continues

Maltreatment reports are still increasing in Hennepin County, as they are elsewhere. Since 2009, we have seen:

- 96.3 percent more child protection reports; 20,258 in 2016
- 99.5 percent more maltreatment findings; 2,925 in 2016
- 99 percent more kids removed from abusive homes and placed into foster care; 2,366 in 2016

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This volume has overwhelmed our system and compromised the county's ability to deliver the highest quality services to families.

Redesigning the system to support families

Motivated by child injury and deaths, the county initiated a study, which found systemic faults in the child protection system.

In addition, both Governor Mark Dayton's Child Protection Task Force and Hennepin County's Oversight Committee proposed radical changes to the way we approach kids and families, including:

- Offering practical help to prevent family crisis, in order to reduce the number of reports and the actual number of children experiencing maltreatment.
- Using early intervention—looking at the family's history and service needs with Hennepin County—to reduce the number of children who experience multiple episodes of maltreatment.
- Enhancing child well-being by prioritizing children's physical health, mental health and social/emotional well-being.
- Establishing reasonable caseloads for social workers so they can deliver appropriate services and build supportive relationships with families and communities.

More resources are needed to support system changes

Hennepin County has implemented significant changes in the way we work with kids who are at risk of maltreatment. Since spring 2015, we have:

- Hired 100 staff in Child Protection Services and the County Attorney's Office
- Implemented a 24-7 child protection response
- Consolidated staff primarily in four locations to promote communication and collaboration

In 2015, the county allocated \$3.6 million to increase child protection staffing. For 2017, the Board of Commissioners approved \$13 million to continue to address increasing child protection caseloads and to begin instituting the child well-being practice model.

Additional state resources are needed to leverage the county's investment in a pilot program that can be replicated for better outcomes for kids and families across the state.

Children's lives are at stake

Children who die from maltreatment are disproportionately young; almost half are younger than one year. Most are younger than three years.

Children who experience multiple episodes of maltreatment have shorter life expectancies than their peers.

As adults, abused and neglected children struggle to maintain employment. Over the course of their lives, they experience higher costs for health care, special education, child welfare and criminal justice interventions.

Children who do not experience maltreatment have better health and success in school, less trouble with the law, healthier relationships and are less likely to become teen parents.

For more information about Child Protection Services and the work of the Child Protection Oversight Committee, visit www.hennepin.us/childprotection.

