

To: Child Welfare Partners  
From: Susan I. Hamilton, MSW, JD  
Date: October 26, 2007  
Re: Successful completion of the Emily J. settlement for detention-involved children

When we work together, we work most effectively. There is no better example of this than in our joint work that brings a successful conclusion to the Emily J. settlement agreement for detention-involved children.

There is much credit to be passed around for this important development in how we serve this vulnerable population of children. I want to congratulate and thank our partners in the Judicial Branch and in the community of private service providers as well as DCF's bureaus of Juvenile Services and Behavioral Health and Medicine, our Area Office staff, and others instrumental in the work that resulted in the recent successful completion of the Emily J. settlement agreement. That settlement, which stemmed from legal action taken in 1993 on behalf of children placed in Judicial Branch detention centers, established a number of community-based services statewide and was concluded based upon the State having met its obligations.

The settlement in its second year resulted in the development of more than \$6 million in community based treatment services for detention-involved children at imminent risk for residential treatment. As a result, 72 percent of children reviewed by joint DCF and CSSD teams were diverted from unnecessary residential placements, and two-thirds of the children remained in the community successfully for at least six months.

This collaboration brings DCF social workers, Juvenile Probation Officers and families together to identify the services and supervision needed for children to successfully remain in the community. That nearly three quarters of the children could be served without taking them away from their communities, from their families, and their schools is a clear demonstration that community-based and in-home services work.

Because offering treatment services and strengthening families has proven to be an effective and efficient way to work with these children and their families, we must stay on this course. For this reason, the Department recently reached a new agreement with the Judicial Branch to continue the collaboration and community-based services beyond the term of the original settlement agreement. DCF and the Judicial Branch will continue to convene teams of staff to identify and divert children from unnecessary residential placements by providing community based services. The services include in-home substance abuse treatment, counseling, mentoring, educational support, therapeutic group homes, and therapeutic foster care. DCF will also continue to hold "triage" meetings for DCF-involved children admitted to detention and develop release plans for the court's consideration when possible and appropriate.

The development of the Memorandum of Agreement with the Judicial Branch coincides with a major shift in the way the State responds to children and families receiving a judicial designation as a "Family With Service Needs" or "FWSN". Typically children who are truant, runaways or experience other behavior problems can be referred to Juvenile Court under a FWSN petition. Historically, some of these children have ended up in detention for

violating court orders or continuing their FWSN behaviors. Under a law enacted in 2006 and effective October 1, 2007, these children can no longer be placed into a detention center for continued FWSN behavior unless they have also committed a delinquent act. That means DCF and the Judicial Branch will need to serve these children and their families in a timely manner in their communities and homes.

The work of the two branches of government, together with private service providers, family members and advocates, shows that we are ready to rise to this challenge and offer effective and timely community-based services. I want to thank everyone who worked so well together to accomplish these important objectives. This is a strong demonstration of what we can do when partners work together united by a common vision for improving services and outcomes. We will continue to build bridges that result in better lives for children and families, and I thank you for your contribution to our collective work as a State and as a community.