

Senate Bill 350 was introduced by Senators Unterman (45), Millar (40), Beach (21), Shafer (48), Sims (12) and others on February 4, 2014.

Questions We Are Asking

1. Many will question the rapid pace at which the Georgia child welfare privatization has moved along since the formation of the Lt. Governor's Workgroup in late October.
2. Others will also question how this bill and approach will solve the child protective services crisis in which caseloads have doubled within the last 12 months.

Other groups of stakeholders will preach caution, asking for:

1. More time to review other states experiences.
2. A full account of the foundational strengths already developed over the last decade in Georgia.
3. A watchful eye on the shift in the provision of physical and behavioral health care from traditional Medicaid into a managed care model under Amerigroup.
4. Patience as we implement the new provisions of the Juvenile Code.
5. Bold, decisive leadership that brings stakeholders together to evaluate the pro's, con's and strategy at each stage of the legislation and beyond.

We have reviewed the Bil, evaluated it in the context of our positions as former state and private sector employees who really love Georgia, and in the consideration that we are not being compensated to see it pass or fail. We have objectively noted several considerations that we urge lawmakers and stakeholders to review as they deliberate. *"Wise men or foolish boys" – the difference is often seen by the number of people either side chooses to talk to and the amount of objective evidence they ask for as they make decisions.*

Considerations for Georgia Senate Bill 350

1. A Committee Should Be Created Within SB350

Allow for a planning period of July 1, 2014 through June 30, 2015 wherein a designated Committee of no more than 20 members conducts and develops the following:

- (a) Develops a vision statement for an improved model that promotes outcomes
- (b) A thoughtful, family-informed approach that captures the geographic differentiators
- (c) Facilitates through surveys and regional forums the service arrays required

- (d) Defines the governance, composition, reporting structure and communication with anticipated applicants/contractors
- (e) A communication approach that keeps non-Committee members informed
- (f) Recognizes the current successes and assets within Georgia while also targeting the needed improvements

2. Similarities to Fully Privatized Models

Florida and Kansas Regionalized Lead Agency Model supporting family preservation, foster care, post adoption services, and includes the transition of case management from the state system to the regional lead agencies

3. Geographical Allocation - Recognizing What Works in Georgia and Building On It Through a Regional Method of Contracting

1. SB350 specifies a geographical alignment where in regional lead agencies are aligned with the DFCS service regions.

Note: The 2006 approach in Florida is different than 2014 Georgia.

2. This geographical alignment ignores the importance of juvenile courts in many child welfare cases, including CHINS and foster care cases.

Recommendations:

(a) Georgia has 10 judicial districts. The districts can be used as the geographical starting point for a review of the Georgia model, including an assessment of which district region could be combined to enhance efficiencies. For example, judicial district combinations could include Districts 7 and 9; Districts 3 and 6; 8 and 10; 1 and 2; and 4 and 5. A total of 5 distinct regional lead agencies, and 1 statewide MWO lead agency (see below) serving the local needs of DFCS.

(b) In addition to the alternative geographical alignment, we recommend the Committee evaluate an additional alternative based on the child's acuity. i.e. a statewide, lead agency approach under (an) umbrella agency(ies) serving children or youth with intensive, acute therapeutic needs.

4. No Reference to Funding for Analysis and Training

1. The federal Administration for Children and Families offers matched federal funding support to states that are approved for a IV-E waiver for design, evaluation and training.
2. SB350 does not reference this enhanced support. It does, cite at the conclusion that the Bill will not go into effect (Law) if the federal ACF does not approve the IV-E waiver. The presumed reason for this is due to the “block grant” style or nature of regionalized funding based on historical trends, and the combining of family preservation, or non-IV-E supported services, into the amount of funds and scope of responsibilities that the lead agency is designed to carry, also referred to as the flexibility afforded by a waiver.
3. The Letter of Intent to ACF was filed prior to the legislation being introduced; are the two in sync?

5. IV-E Waiver and Federal Funding Commitments – Unreasonable Sequence of Events

1. The Department is given a date that precedes the passage of the bill (April 2014) to “seek approval of a child welfare demonstration project through the federal Administration for Children and Families to implement and receive fixed funding
2. The Department is asked to request and negotiate a fixed federal funding allotment, capped over a multi-year period, without knowing what the funding from Georgia state revenues will be. Moreover, the state could potentially wind up with a federal funding level that is similar to the levels we have seen in FY2009-2014, a number that is far lower than pre-2009 funding levels. Reduced and capped IV-E fund levels could dramatically impact the success, or demand a far higher reliance upon state revenues in order to support the Committee’s plan (presumably finalized in the Spring of 2015). to accomplish the purposes of this article.”

6. \$72 million decreases in Foster Care funding, and another \$20 million to Child Protective Services (2009-2014)

1. These years for Georgia represent the impact of draconian state budget cuts far in excess of other Georgia state agencies and that impacted Out-of-Home-Care of more than \$50 million. Attempting to carry over the TANF funding approach and the use of non-cash Maintenance of Effort (MOE) for TANF into a privatized model for financing is a call for a federal and state audit. The risks to the lead agencies are high given the known threats to the current funding approach.
2. This time period also impacted the Child Welfare Services budgets and resources to the tune of \$20 million. Supplanting this loss with TANF over time continues to pull flexibility from the Division on the resources it has and will be able to offer at risk families and jeopardizes child safety.