Child Protection Removals and Reunifications

Update to 2022 Evaluation Report   **February 2024**

Problems Identified

- **Fragmented Oversight.** Minnesota's decentralized child protection system gives local child protection agencies, law enforcement, and courts substantial discretion to make decisions about seeking removal of a child from the home. Practices vary across the state.

- **Missing Information on Law Enforcement Holds.** Although law enforcement emergency holds are the most common way children are removed from the home, the Department of Human Services (DHS) does not track which law enforcement agencies issue holds. Without such data, it is difficult to assess whether some agencies issue more holds than others, or examine if outcomes vary based on differences in local practices.

- **Minimal Law Enforcement Training.** No state requirements exist for ongoing law enforcement training on the use of emergency holds in child protection removals.

- **Confusing Communications.** Documents provided to parents seeking to reunify with children removed from their care can be lengthy and difficult to understand.

Changes Implemented

- **Workgroup Formed.** DHS has convened a workgroup comprising representatives from state and local child protection and law enforcement agencies and various stakeholder groups. DHS staff said the group hopes to make recommendations regarding law enforcement training to the 2025 Legislature.

Actions Needed

- **Improve Data Collection.** DHS staff told us that they have concluded the department's data system for child welfare, the Social Service Information System, lacks the capacity to collect information on which law enforcement agencies issue child protection holds. If that is the case, we recommend that the Legislature require this data to be collected in another way.

- **Provide Parents Simpler Information.** The Legislature should require child protection agencies to provide parents with short, easy-to-understand summaries of what they must do to pursue reunification with their children.