



Washington State Auditor's Office Performance Audit Description

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Services and Financial Support to Foster Care Adoptive Families

Audit overview

Most parents in the state who adopt children from foster care face the challenge of raising children with special needs. Through its Adoption Support program, Washington offers adoptive families financial support and medical assistance, mental health counseling, and parent support groups to help prevent failed adoptions, abuse, and neglect.

The Children's Administration within the Department of Social and Health Services administers the program. In fiscal year 2012, Children's Administration finalized 1,420 adoptions and provided financial support for almost 15,000 children. Federal law requires states to provide financial support to families who face financial challenges and would not adopt if financial support for the child was unavailable. Most of the \$94.7 million spent last year for the program provided monthly cash payments, which are negotiated based on the needs of the child and the circumstances of the family. Other payments included one-time reimbursement for the expenses of completing the adoption. In fiscal year 2011, all of the children adopted from foster care were considered to have special needs and 91 percent of them received financial support.

In 2012, Governor Gregoire convened the Severe Abuse of Adopted Children Work Group in response to several abuse cases involving adopted children. This work group recommended that the state develop a continuum of support services for adoptive families. Research shows the primary service lacking in states' adoption support programs is children's mental health services. In 2012, the Legislature reduced the amount of monthly financial support available for adoptive families due to the state's budget constraints.

Audit objectives

Our audit will seek to answer these questions:

- What services does Children's Administration offer adoptive families?
- To what extent do adoption support payments and services meet the needs of adoptive families?
- How do Washington's services compare to requirements in state law, services in other states, and national research?

Timing

We estimate audit results will be released in early 2014.

October 2013