Memorandum of Understanding
between
The Administrative Office of the Courts
and
The North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services
and
The Office of Indigent Defense Services

This Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) is entered by and between the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC), the NC Department of Health and Human Services (NCDHHS), and the Office of Indigent Defense Services (IDS). This agreement replaces in full the Memorandum of Understanding between the parties dated June 2, 2009.

A. The purpose of the agreement is to:

- Establish a collaborative relationship between the AOC, NCDHHS, and IDS;
- Improve outcomes of safety, permanence, and well-being of abused, neglected, and dependent children who are in the court system;
- Implement evidence-based practices, best practices, and promising approaches;
- Respond jointly to findings from state and federal program reviews and/or audits;
- Identify trends which impact outcomes for children and their families and develop responsive strategies; and
- Engage in training activities to enhance practice in juvenile court.

B. Background

This partnership between the AOC, NCDHHS, and IDS is necessary to encourage early and effective intervention in abuse, neglect, and dependency cases and to encourage courts and agencies to work collaboratively to facilitate the implementation of consistent and appropriate child and family service plans.

The **Administrative Office of the Courts** (AOC) provides statewide administrative support for the district courts which have jurisdiction in the court hearings of abused, neglected, and dependent children. The AOC includes the Court Programs and Management Services Division and the Guardian ad Litem (GAL) Services Division. The Court Programs and Management Services Division of the AOC provides technical assistance and consultation to district court judges and staff who plan and implement Family Courts, Family Drug Treatment Courts, and Juvenile Court Improvement Program (CIP) activities. The Juvenile CIP is obligated by acceptance of federal grant funds to respond to the Administration for Children and Families, specifically the Children's Bureau, regarding improvement in child welfare courts throughout the state.

The GAL Services Division provides legal advocacy for children who are brought before the Court through a petition alleging abuse or neglect and, at the trial judge's discretion, dependency.

The NC **Division of Social Services** (NCDSS) within the NCDHHS is responsible for the supervision and administration of social services programs in all 100 county departments of social services. This administration is accomplished by developing policy, and providing supervision, guidance, training and consultation regarding services for abused, neglected, and/or dependent children and their families. Through the Multiple Response System (MRS), the System of Care (SOC) principles, and Child and Family Teams (CFT), local DSS agencies provide family-centered services and embrace meaningful family participation to better serve children in their own community.

The NCDSS is charged with responding to the federal Administration for Children and Families (ACF) regarding the status of the state's child welfare program. The NCDSS is the state child welfare agency held accountable for the findings of the federal Child and Family Services Reviews (CFSR). Through the CFSR process, the NCDSS works collaboratively with public and private agencies to improve outcomes for children.

The **Office of Indigent Defense Services** (IDS) is responsible for ensuring that qualified attorneys are appointed to represent indigent parents who are facing the possible loss of their children; and that every attorney appointed to represent an indigent parent has access to the training, support, resources, and consultation services they need to be an effective advocate.

Additional partners who have members who serve on the Interagency Collaborative are:

- NC Department of Public Instruction
- Family and Children's Resource Program, Jordan Institute-UNC-Chapel Hill School of Social Work

C. Agreement:

1. Best Court Practices

The parties to this MOU embrace the shared goal of improving the effectiveness of the juvenile court system to ensure the safety, permanence, and well-being of abused, neglected, and dependent children involved.

To attain this goal, the parties are committed to promoting best court practices that include:

- Implementation of Local Rules for Juvenile Court that include among other provisions, the assignment of one judge to one family, active case management by the court, methods for the exchange of information between parties, and child planning conferences within days after the petition is filed;
- Each party to be competently and diligently represented and receive due process;

- Reduced delays in court proceedings through trial date certainty and meeting statutory time frames for events;
- Use of the Child and Family Team process to support family involvement throughout the intervention process;
- Early identification and provision of appropriate services for the family;
- Participation of children, when appropriate, in the proceedings;
- Use of non-adversarial, collaborative court practices when practicable; and
- Policies and practices to minimize trauma for all involved in the court process.

2. Partner Collaboration

The parties to this MOU recognize and support the vital role of partnerships with other agencies and organizations to improve outcomes for abused, neglected, and dependent children.

To attain this goal, the parties are committed to:

- Routine information and data sharing practices, in accord with statutes governing confidentiality of juvenile court information;
- Attending regular meetings at the State level to establish and maintain working relationships;
- Actively participating in Federal and State Children and Family Service Reviews (CFSR) and Program Improvement Planning;
- Solving problems and resolving conflicts between partner agencies at the State and local level;
- Supporting statutory changes and funding initiatives in the General Assembly to improve outcomes for abused, neglected, and dependent children; and
- Actively participating as members on advisory committees and/or task forces.

3. Training and Cross-Training

The parties to this MOU are committed to identifying unmet training needs and increasing training opportunities for all parties serving in juvenile court, including judges, clerks, attorneys, DSS, Court Programs, and GAL staff and volunteers.

To attain this goal, the parties are committed to:

- Developing and providing workshops at conferences designed for participants to learn about evidence-based practices, best practices, and model initiatives; and
- Providing cross-training opportunities between judges, attorneys, court personnel, and child welfare staff to build effective relationships at the local level.

4. Local Level Implementation

The parties to this MOU are committed to supporting the development and implementation of Local Memoranda of Agreements that operationalize commitments contained in this MOU.

D. Term of Agreement

This agreement will be effective from the date of signature. This agreement will be reviewed annually.

E. Revisions

Revision of this agreement may be made upon the approval of all agencies and shall become effective upon the date of agreement.

F. Signatures

Administrative Office of the Courts

Marion R Warren

Marion Warren, Director

3/8/18

Date

North Carolina Department of Human Services

Mandy K. Cohen, Secretary

Date

Office of Indigent Defense Services

Thomas K. Maher, Executive Director

Date

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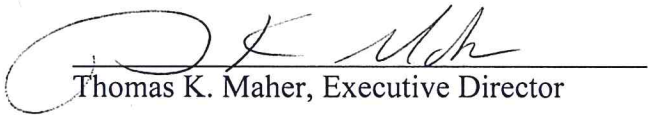
Administrative Office of the Courts

_____ _____
Marion Warren, Director *Date*

North Carolina Department of Human Services

_____ _____
Mandy K. Cohen, Secretary *Date*

Office of Indigent Defense Services


Thomas K. Maher, Executive Director

3-26-2018
Date

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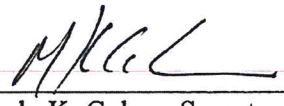
Marion Warren, Director *Date*

North Carolina Department of Human Services



Feb 5, 2019
Mandy K. Cohen, Secretary *Date*

Office of Indigent Defense Services

_____ _____
Thomas K. Maher, Executive Director *Date*