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Timeline: Connecticut Department of Children & Families Under Federal Oversight

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June 23, 2011 | Compiled by Courant researcher Tina Bachetti, The Hartford Courant

December 1989: Suit filed

The Connecticut Civil Liberties Union and the American Civil Liberties Union's Children's Rights Project file a class-action lawsuit against Gov. William O'Neill and the state Department of Children and Youth Services. The suit charges that an overworked and underfunded DCYS fails to provide services including abuse and neglect investigations, adoption, foster care, mental health care, caseloads and staffing.

January 1991: Decree signed

Lawyers for the children and the state sign a formal federal consent decree, known as the "Juan F." consent decree, after one of the child plaintiffs. Sweeping changes are called for, including the establishment of a training academy for DCYS employees and foster parents; reducing caseloads for workers, who average 34 cases each; uniform standards on how abuse and neglect cases should be handled; and an independent court monitor to assess progress.



March 1993: Out of compliance

Budget cuts of more than \$8.7 million at DCYS results in noncompliance with the decree in terms of staffing, payments to foster parents and program improvements.

June 1993: Judge orders staff increase

U.S. District Judge Alan Nevas orders DCF to hire more staff to reduce caseloads and to increase payments to foster parents. (Also that year, the department changes its name to the Department of Children and Families.)

February 1995: Problems reported

Federal monitor reports caseloads continue to be a problem.

March 1995: Investigation ordered

Gov. John G. Rowland demands an investigation of DCF after 9-month-old Emily Hernandez is raped and murdered by her mother's live-in boyfriend and 16-month-old Candy Fortis is killed by her father. After reviewing thousands of files at DCF, state officials remove more than 100 children from their parents' custody and put them in foster care.

February 1996: Problems reported

Monitor reports DCF not meeting caseload standards.

November 2000: Failures reported

Monitor finds that workers fail to make required face-to-face visits to children in foster homes 98 percent of the time and fail to make required telephone contacts 96 percent of the time. Also, more than 25 percent of foster homes exceed capacity and nearly 8 percent have expired licenses.

February-June 2001: More workers sought

Monitor finds DCF must hire many additional social workers to reduce overtime and meet caseload and visitation standards.

July 2001-June 2002: Court issues orders

Lawyers for children intermittently accuse the state of noncompliance. DCF officials say they are concerned mandates are too restrictive. Court issues orders holding DCF accountable to visitation, adoption and mental health standards.

November 2001: Smaller caseloads

The state agrees to reduce caseloads to a maximum of 23 per social worker after report finds DCF is not meeting foster

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child visitation standards.

January 2002: Speeding adoptions

DCF agrees to speed up the adoption process. DCF officials say adoption rates have improved from a low of 146 in 1996, when Connecticut had the worst adoption records of any state in the country, to 603 in 2000.

February 2002: 22-point plan

Court approves a 22-point plan to replace the multi-volume requirements of the consent decree. Goals include avoiding crowding in foster homes, reducing the number of moves children make while in foster care, and reducing the length of time children spend in foster care. DCF must also maintain current levels of staff and spending under the terms. Federal oversight will end if DCF meets performance standards.

November 2002: Incomplete records

Monitor says incomplete DCF records make it difficult to assess DCF's success in meeting service demands for foster children. Study also shows DCF is doing better in meeting children's mental health, medical and dental needs, but fails to meet the goal of completing investigations of alleged abuse and neglect within 30 days.

April 2003: Monitor says DCF falls short

Monitor finds DCF is "falling far short of agreed-upon measures" in reducing overcrowded foster homes, overstays in shelters and in recruiting new foster homes.

July 2003: Ordered to reduce caseloads

Court order issued accepting monitor's findings that DCF is in significant noncompliance with caseload standards and staffing requirements; state ordered to reduce caseloads and hire more staff immediately.

September 2003: Receivership sought

Lawyers for children ask court to place DCF in federal receivership.

October 2003: New agreement

Agreement makes partners of the federal court monitor, the DCF commissioner, and the state Office of Policy and Management secretary, who will work together to control the agency. The agreement removes the threat of federal receivership for DCF; dissolves the terms of the old federal consent decree, and is meant to eliminate some of the legal and political obstacles that have crippled the process in the past.

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Hartford Courant, 285 Broad Street, Hartford, CT 06115

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