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### **DHS commissioner announces formation of Child Foster Care Work Group** *Experts will advise department on foster care system improvements*

Minnesota Human Services Commissioner Lucinda Jesson has appointed a work group to review concerns about the child foster care system and provide recommendations on how to make improvements.

“We rely on foster parents to provide the safe, nurturing environment that children need,” Jesson said. “The majority of foster children return to their birth families and some may be adopted by their foster parents. Unfortunately, sometimes there are poor outcomes when we don’t give children and foster parents the support they need.”

In addition, there appears to be a shortage of qualified foster care providers, and a disproportionate number of African-American and American Indian children removed from their homes and placed in foster care. These combined circumstances call for a comprehensive review.

“I want this team of experts to focus on keeping children safe while improving the foster care system in Minnesota,” she said.

Members of the group are:

- Honorable Anne McKeig, Fourth Judicial District
- Honorable Gerald Seibel, Eighth Judicial District
- Joe Plumer, White Earth Nation
- Lisa Pollak, Fond du Lac Human Services
- VJ Smith and Cortland Powell, MAD DADS
- Mary Regan, Minnesota Council of Child Caring Agencies
- Foster youth representatives;
- Arlana and Brandon Omaha, foster parents
- Rena Moran and Deb Diver Leith, parent leaders
- Penny Robertson, Hennepin County; Melanie Erickson, Morrison County, both Minnesota Association of County Social Services representatives
- A representative to be named from law enforcement
- Lisa Cain Becking and Julie Snyder, Minnesota Department of Corrections
- Sue Benolken, Minnesota Department of Education

DHS Inspector General Jerry Kerber and Assistant Commissioner of Children and Family Services Jim Koppel will lead the work group, which will convene for the first time on August 4.

Specifically, the work group will make initial recommendations on:

- Recruitment, application and licensing processes for foster care homes overseen by county, tribal, and private agencies
- Policies that determine how children are removed from their homes, focusing on how to minimize and treat trauma.
- Quality and availability of staffing and resources, including case coordination to improve educational outcomes, medication management, screenings, referrals and monitoring, family visitation planning, and reunification and permanency planning.

The work group will also address a number of other topics, including:

- Northstar Care for Children
- Minnesota Assessment of Parenting Children and Youth
- Child maltreatment reports in foster care (screening, investigation, licensing notification)
- Curricula and training resources for foster care providers
- Reunification and aftercare support services
- Racial disproportionality in foster care
- Sex trafficked youth in foster care
- Reasonable and prudent parent standards.

The work group will provide initial recommendations in a report to the Minnesota Department of Human Services and the public by Nov. 1, 2015, and final recommendations by March 1, 2016.