DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES

Update to the Minnesota Legislature – SSIS Modernization and Paperwork Reduction Act

Date: July 11, 2024

To: Senator Melissa Wiklund, Chair, Senate Health and Human Services Committee
Senator Paul Utke, Ranking Minority Member, Senate Health and Human Services Committee
Representative Dave Pinto, Chair, House Children and Families Finance and Policy Committee
Representative Brian Daniels, Minority Lead, House Children and Families Finance and Policy Committee

From: Tikki Brown, Commissioner, Department of Children, Youth, and Families

RE: Child Protection Paperwork Reduction Act progress update

During Minnesota's 2023 legislative session, the Commissioner of the Department of Human Services was directed to study and make recommendations for paperwork reduction relating to child protection cases, often referred to as the "Child Protection Paperwork Reduction Act". This included three major components: a review of child protection work within the Social Services Information System (SSIS), a review of the current state of SSIS's technical stability and performance, and an assessment with recommendations for future modernization. This work will continue under the leadership of the Commissioner of the Department of Children, Youth and Families beginning July 1, 2024.

Minnesota Session Laws- 2023 Article 14 Sec. 38

DIRECTION TO THE COMMISSIONER OF HUMAN SERVICES; CHILD PROTECTION INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY SYSTEM REVIEW.

(a) The commissioner of human services must contract with an independent consultant to perform a thorough evaluation of the social services information system (SSIS) that supports the child protection system in Minnesota. The consultant must make recommendations for improving the current system for usability, system performance, and federal Comprehensive Child Welfare Information System compliance. Technical problems must be addressed and any unnecessary or unduly burdensome data entry requirements that have contributed to system capacity issues must be identified. The consultant must assist the commissioner with selecting a platform for future development of an information technology system for child protection.

(b) The commissioner of human services must conduct a study and develop recommendations to streamline and reduce SSIS data entry requirements for child protection cases. The study must review all input fields required on current reporting forms and determine which input fields and information are required under state or federal law. The study must be completed in partnership with local social services agencies and other entities, as determined by the commissioner. By June 30, 2024, the commissioner must provide a status report and an implementation timeline to the chairs and ranking minority members of the legislative committees with jurisdiction over child protection. The status report must include information about the procedures used for soliciting ongoing user input from stakeholders, the progress made on soliciting and hiring a consultant to conduct the system evaluation required under paragraph (a), and a report on the progress and completed efforts to streamline data entry requirements and improve user experiences.

Progress Report – Evaluation of SSIS (§ 38, subd. (a))

The 2023 legislation included $2 million in funding for contracts with external vendors for current state and future state assessments. Through the federal Advance Planning Document process, Minnesota will receive a matching $2 million for further planning, user experience research, and implementation of recommendations. Minnesota Information Technology Services (MNIT@DHS) has written two Requests for Offer (RFO) based on money received by the legislature. The first is to find a consultant who will examine existing performance and stability problems with SSIS. This was published in April 2024 and an expert in software architecture and programming in the Delphi language has been hired and began work June 28. This work will result in biweekly reports to the SSIS Manager. The second RFO is to hire a consulting firm to identify multiple potential platforms and approaches, and associated costs to modernize SSIS. This will be published July 2 with a report expected by February 2025. The Governor's supplemental budget in 2024 included $10 million to begin planning SSIS modernization with the expectation that there would be additional funding requests for full implementation. This initial funding will be used to staff MNIT with architects who can select the appropriate platform based on recommendations, purchase development tools, hire vendors, and begin implementation of recommendations based on priorities established by DCYF and the local social service agencies.

Progress Report – Streamline Data Entry (§ 38, subd. (b))

Law and policy changes have been incorporated into SSIS as data entry requirements over the last 24 years. Complaints focus on duplicative data entry, policy changes that require finely detailed data entry, and exceedingly complicated and lengthy case plans. Data entry burdens are heightened by application slowness and outages that have come from centralizing State application servers. The application has

become unintuitive and difficult to navigate. The Department, in collaboration with MNIT, is focused on improving user experience in the current application and when the application is modernized.

An extensive and systematic review of SSIS data entry requirements was completed between January and April 2024. Business Operations staff conducted 12 listening sessions with over 100 participants from county and Tribal social services and 50 DHS policy staff where they conducted a field-by-field review. Major themes identified:

- The user interface is not intuitive, nor easy to navigate.
- Logon process is burdensome and unreliable.
- Information is not automatically saved.
- Extensive workarounds are necessary on many screens and are not documented.
- Struggles with documents working as designed and managing documents is challenging. They would like a modern electronic document management system.
- Inadequate ADA accessibility

Each field was analyzed based on the source of the requirement (federal law, state law, administrative policy, social work practice policy); if it is duplicative data entry; and if there is an opportunity to improve the design. The review also documented how a field's presence or absence may affect the ability to identify and address the vast racial disparities in the child welfare system for African American and American Indian children. Many of these data elements are not legally required but are critical in informing analyses that improve policy and practice that will reduce these disparities, particularly in the out-of-home placement of children.

 Based on data collected in the review DHS identified improvements that could be made in the current system to improve case worker experience in the short-term. DHS is working with MNIT development staff in a small product team called the Paperwork Reduction Team, that is prioritizing this work. Items selected were identified to address areas that would improve child protection case worker experience and could be completed within the scope of maintenance and operations while waiting for decisions on modernization directions. Table 1 outlines the work items for immediate action. Updates will be provided to the Minnesota Association of County Social Service Agencies in a quarterly workplan report, next due in July 2024.

SSIS Partnership

The SSIS Partnership has been established to provide Tribes, local agencies, MNIT, and DHS staff with opportunities to jointly plan the future of SSIS, address emerging problems and urgent

system needs, provide a more positive user experience, and develop communication channels. Committee members will contribute to decisions related to the modernization and improvement of SSIS and its business operations. The Founding Executive Committee consists of social services administrative leadership from county and tribal social services, MNIT, and DHS (Appendix A). This Committee began meeting in May 2024 and will meet monthly ongoing. The Executive Committee will create subcommittees, and will monitor progress on this legislation, as well as other workplans.

Contact Information

If you have questions about this update or SSIS modernization in general, please contact Jennifer Sommerfeld, Government Relations Director, Department of Children, Youth, and Families (jennifer.sommerfeld@state.mn.us).

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Table 1. Data Entry Improvements Identified in the CP Paperwork Reduction Review

Work Items	Notes/Due Date
Increase the amount of data allowed to be entered in the Child Maltreatment Report Conclusions.	SSIS release August 2024.
Staff Activity data entry screen: 1) Users would like to see the client date of birth or age displayed to be able to identify minors on the case. 2) Add an "Active Efforts" check box on a contact/activity to help identify specific actions that meet legal ICWA Active Efforts guidelines.	SSIS release date November 2024.
Staff Activity reports: 1) Users would like to be able to sort a report of their activity by the "Purpose" description field. 2) Make the display of the case note optional in the report grid display. This would streamline the report	SSIS release date November 2024.
New state document to notify a mandated reporter of maltreatment if the report was screened in or screened out.	A draft available and waiting for policy approval. Release expected December 2024.
Fentanyl needs to be added to the substance use/abuse list.	SSIS release date November 2024.
Substance use data: Users would like a more efficient way to add substance use data.	Planning phase. Release date expected March 2025.
Revise case plans to reduce duplicative data entry; make plans more customizable based on the recipient; make plans more understandable and actionable for families, service providers and judges.	Work has been completed with Child Safety and Permanency division policy staff to align the case plans with state and federal law and remove requirements. The plan has been reduced to eight pages based on this work. This is the highest priority item as well as the largest level of effort.
Add an alert that a child maltreatment report has been transferred from another county or tribe.	This work is being assessed by business analysts. A similar process exists for adult protection reports that may be replicable.

Social/Medical History data entry	Planning phase.
Person race data: Users would like a more efficient way to add race data. Presently, adding multiple races and multiple tribes or Asian ethnicity is an onerous task.	Planning phase.
Payment voucher re-design	Planning phase.
Names: Add "chosen name" type	Planning phase.
SSIS Fiscal data: A mechanism to enable the purge of fiscal data needs to be in place to allow for the routine purge of all social services data according to legal timelines.	Planning phase. This is not burdensome to individual users but will be critical to have in place before modernization.

Appendix A. SSIS Partnership Founding Executive Committee

Local agency Advisors:

- Penny Grove, Red Lake County, Fiscal/IT Supervisor,
- Deb Sjostrom, Otter Tail County, Human Services Director
- Simoine Bolin, Des Moines Valley, Health and Human Services Executive Director
- Janet Nilsen, St. Louis County, Business Manager
- Suzanne Arntson, Scotty County, Health and Human Services Deputy Director
- Jon Usitalo, Hennepin County, IT Manager ITRM service area
- Deana McDaniel, Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe Social Services

DCYF and DHS Advisors:

- Alex Mentes, SSIS Manager
- Eric Kratt, SSIS User Support Supervisor
- Cynthia Shypulski, SSIS Business Operations Supervisor
- Marcia Ryss, SSIS Change and Engagement Coordinator
- Heide Moris, SSIS Mentor Program Coordinator
- Jen Droneck, Continuous Quality Improvement and Research Manager, Child Safety and Permanency
- Jay Fisherman, Tribal Modernization Coordinator, Office of Indian Policy

MNIT Advisors:

- Jackie Hayes, MNIT Program Manager
- Gerry Benusa, Systems Development Supervisor