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January 14, 2008

To: Supervisor Yvonne B. Burke, Chair
Supervisor Gloria Molina
Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky
Supervisor Don Knabe
Supervisor Michael D. Antonovich

From: J. Tyler McCauley
Auditor-Controller

SUBJECT: **CHILD PROTECTION HOTLINE**

On August 28, 2007, your Board instructed the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) to work with the Auditor-Controller and the Director of Children and Family Services to conduct a review of calls made to the Child Protection Hotline (CPH or Hotline) to examine issues such as nature and quantity of calls, response times, current mechanisms for quality control, reasons for dropped calls and the utilization of the callback message system. The Hotline is a 24 hours a day, seven days a week, call center designed to receive reports of child abuse and neglect throughout Los Angeles County. The Child Protection Hotline is one of the largest child welfare hotlines in the nation, handling in excess of 180,000 calls annually.

Scope and Objectives

Our review included an analysis of calls to the Hotline during a two-year period from October 2005 through September 2007. We interviewed Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) management and staff and reviewed CPH activity reports and callback records as appropriate. We also interviewed information systems staff from the Internal Services Department to assess the CPH's computer security. In addition, we followed up on allegations contained in an anonymous letter addressed to Supervisor Burke that alleged DCFS management falsely reported CPH statistics to the Board of Supervisors and others.

Summary of Key Findings

Overall, DCFS is answering calls to the Hotline within its policy of 60 seconds. Additional effort is needed to ensure calls routed to the Supervisor and Overflow call groups are answered timely. For example, during the period October 2006 through September 2007, the waiting time for calls to the Supervisor and Overflow groups averaged 1 minute 29 seconds and 2 minutes 7 seconds, respectively. According to the Department, the 60 second standard does not apply to calls routed to the Supervisor or Overflow groups and no other standard exists. We have recommended that the Department develop a performance standard for calls placed in the Supervisor and Overflow groups.

We also noted that DCFS needs to improve its monitoring of the callback process and strengthen controls to ensure all callback messages are returned timely and are properly documented. During our review, we noted that:

- Messages were not always returned within the Department's 30 minute standard, including some messages left by law enforcement.

- For our test sample, callback times ranged from two minutes to three hours. The average callback time, excluding law enforcement was 35 minutes, while the average callback time to law enforcement was 29 minutes.

- Supervising Children's Social Workers (SCSW) and Children's Social Workers (CSW) did not always adequately document callback messages. For example, we noted instances where callback messages did not include the call date and time, and the caller's allegation(s) were not summarized in an understandable manner.

- CSWs do not always adequately document the action taken on callback messages. As a result, we could not always determine whether the CSW returned the calls, or whether the calls resulted in a report and referral of child abuse.

To improve the callback process, we have recommended that DCFS management consider establishing a unit whose sole function is to ensure the prompt and proper disposition of all callback messages. In addition, we have recommended that DCFS management require SCSWs to increase their Hotline monitoring to ensure that all callback messages are returned within 30 minutes and are properly documented and dispositioned. Finally, DCFS management should increase its monitoring of Hotline activities to ensure callback activities meet departmental standards and if not, initiate appropriate corrective action.

We determined that the allegations that DCFS management falsely reported CPH statistics to the Board of Supervisors and others had no merit. In addition, we found no evidence that taxpayer dollars were misappropriated as alleged. Detailed discussions of our findings along with recommendations are included in the attached report.

Review of Report

We discussed our report with DCFS management on January 11, 2008. The Department agrees with all the findings and recommendations for improving the Hotline's operations. Management's response, attached, indicates that they have implemented a number of corrective actions to implement our recommendations and in 30 days will provide the Board with a detailed corrective action plan.

We thank DCFS management and staff for their responsiveness, cooperation and assistance during the audit. We would also like to thank CEO staff for their collaboration throughout the audit.

Please call me if you have any questions, or your staff may contact DeWitt Roberts at (213) 974-8593.

JTM:MMO:DR

Attachments

c: William T Fujioka, Chief Executive Officer
Patricia S. Ploehn, Director, Department of Children and Family Services
Sachi A. Hamai, Executive Officer
Public Information Office
Audit Committee

CHILD PROTECTION HOTLINE

Background

The Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS or Department) is responsible for responding to all reports of child abuse and neglect. To facilitate the reporting of child abuse or neglect, DCFS established a toll-free Child Protection Hotline (CPH or Hotline). The CPH answers telephone calls 24 hours per day, seven days a week and handles in excess of 180,000 calls annually. An Automatic Call Distributor (ACD) routes all calls to an available agent/intake evaluator (i.e., CSW), or holds calls in the order in which they are received (i.e., queue) until a CSW is available to take the call. Once an allegation of child abuse is assessed, a Children's Social Worker (CSW) generates a referral and inputs information into the statewide Child Welfare Case Management Computer System. The referral is then forwarded to a regional office or, if after hours, to the Department's Emergency Response Command Post.

Supervising CSWs (SCSW) monitor queue times on incoming calls and can either manually route calls to other CSWs, take enough information to generate a referral or take a callback message if a CSW is not available and a detailed consultation is required. If the call is for information that can be given quickly in a brief consultation, the SCSW will also handle the call. The Department's policy is to answer all child abuse or neglect calls within 60 seconds and return all callback messages within 30 minutes.

On average, the CPH receives approximately 500 calls per day and has 142 CSWs (119 full-time and 23 part-time) who answer calls. Twenty-four SCSWs, four Assistant Regional Administrators, and one Regional Administrator supervise/manage the CPH operations. For Fiscal Year 2006-07, the CPH budget (Salary and Employee Benefits) totaled approximately $17 million.

Methodology

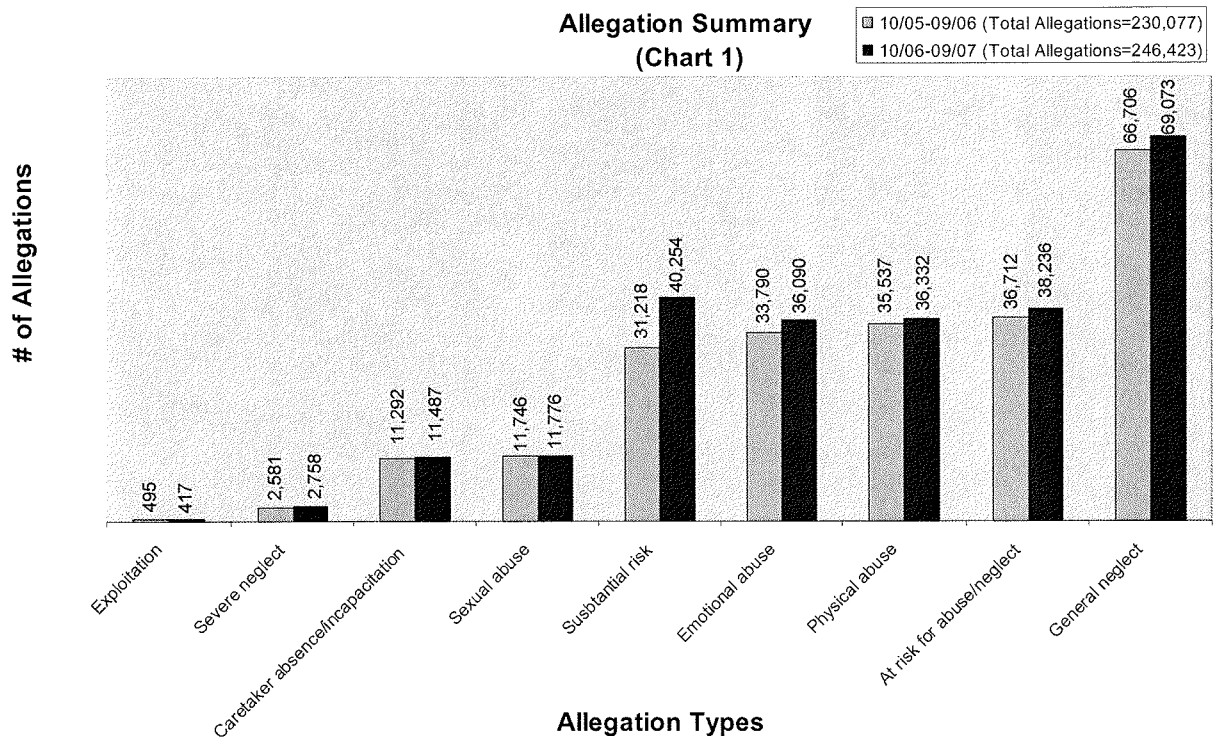
Our review consisted of evaluating ACD activity reports and interviewing DCFS management, staff, and the Internal Services Department's ACD support staff. We also analyzed the queue times for calls during the period October 2006 through September 2007 (review period) to determine the percentage of calls answered within the Department's policy of 60 seconds and whether there was a correlation between excess queue times, staffing, and abandoned/dropped calls (i.e., the caller decides to terminate the call prior to reaching a CSW). To establish baseline data for measuring DCFS' performance in these areas, we compiled and analyzed the same data for the period October 2005 through September 2006 (baseline period).

Nature and Quantity of CPH Calls

The CPH receives calls each day from a variety of sources, including parents, relatives, friends, neighbors, and "mandated reporters" (i.e., law enforcement, clinicians, teachers, etc.) who, under law, are required to report any suspected child abuse. DCFS classifies

the child abuse and neglect allegations into nine different types such as exploitation, sexual abuse, physical abuse, general neglect, etc. (See Attachment I for definitions on allegation types.)

For our baseline and review periods, the CPH received 181,034 and 179,953 calls, respectively. Because a single call may result in multiple allegations (i.e., more than one child is involved or more than one abuse allegation per child), the total allegations for our baseline (230,077) and review (246,423) periods exceeded the Hotline's total incoming calls. Chart 1 below shows the nature (i.e., allegation type) and quantity of allegations.



Analysis

Overall, calls to "General neglect" represented the allegation type with the highest number of reported allegations, totaling 66,706 (29%) and 69,073 (28%) for our baseline and review periods. The "Substantial Risk" allegation type had the greatest percentage increase amongst the allegation types, which increased by 29% (or 9,036 allegations) from our baseline year to review period. According to the Department, the increase was primarily due to related training received by all Hotline intake and supervisory staff. Management indicated that the training enhanced staff awareness and resulted in an increase in allegations classified as "Substantial Risk."

Recommendation

None

Queue Times

Queue time is the elapsed time between when a call is received and answered by an agent/intake evaluator. The ACD prompts Hotline callers to select one of four call groups (Safe Haven, Consultation, English and Spanish) from its automated menu. The ACD routes calls to an available agent/intake evaluator such as a CSW or places calls on hold until a CSW is available to take the call. The Department's policy is to respond to calls within 60 seconds after a call is received. The Department monitors the queue times and summarizes data such as "average speed to answer" calls by call group, etc.

We reviewed the queue times/average speed to answer for calls assigned to the Safe Haven, Consultation, English speaking, Spanish speaking, Supervisor and Overflow groups to evaluate the timeliness in which the Hotline staff answers incoming calls.

Analysis

Calls to the English and Spanish speaking groups cumulatively represent the majority of calls to the CPH and consist of those calls where the caller is ready to make a report of child abuse or neglect. Calls to the Safe Haven group represent callers who want to report a child who has been abandoned ("safely surrendered") and calls to the Consultation group represent calls where the caller wants to discuss issues involving a child, but do not want to report child abuse at the time of the call.

Table 1 below shows the overall average speed to answer calls by group for both years reviewed.

Average Speed to Answer Calls (ASA)
(Table 1)

Call Groups	Oct. 05-Sept. 06 (Baseline Period)		Oct. 06-Sept. 07 (Review Period)	
	Total Calls	ASA	Total Calls	ASA
Safe Haven	2,636	00:00:14	3,170	00:00:14
Consultation	60,553	00:00:34	52,212	00:00:22
English	101,887	00:00:28	97,235	00:00:27
Spanish	12,181	00:00:48	12,002	00:00:36
Subtotals/Averages	**177,257**	**00:00:31**	**164,619**	**00:00:25**
Supervisor	464	00:01:48	213	00:01:29
Overflow	3,313	00:02:04	15,121	00:02:07
Subtotals/Averages	**3,777**	**00:02:02**	**15,334**	**00:02:06**
Totals/Averages	**181,034**	**00:00:33**	**179,953**	**00:00:34**

Overall, the average speed to answer calls increased slightly from 33 to 34 seconds from baseline to review period, but both periods are well within the Department's 60 second standard. When we looked at the Safe Haven, Consultation, English and Spanish groups, the current average speed to answer calls ranged from a low of 14

seconds (Safe Haven) to a high of 36 seconds (English speaking). However, for the Supervisor and Overflow groups, we noted that the Hotline did not meet the 60 second standard and the average speed to answer calls were 1 minute and 29 seconds and 2 minutes and 7 seconds for these groups, respectively. According to Hotline management, the 60 second standard does not apply to these groups and no other performance measure exists.

Recommendations

DCFS management:

1. **Reevaluate the 60 second average speed to answer standard and, as appropriate, implement a new standard based on current performance.**

2. **Establish an average speed to answer call standard for the Supervisor and Overflow groups.**

Additional Comment

We also noted that calls to the Overflow group increased substantially from 3,313 in the baseline year to 15,121 in the review period. According to the Department, calls from the Safe Haven, Consultation, English, and Spanish groups were redirected to the Overflow group in order to help reduce the number of abandoned/dropped calls during the review period. As a result, total abandoned/dropped calls (i.e., after the announcement/greeting) decreased from 5,591 to 3,553 (see Table 2) for the baseline and review periods, respectively. The Department indicated that in November 2007 they assembled a "Rapid Response Team" to help answer calls routed to the Overflow group. DCFS management should monitor the effectiveness of the Rapid Response Team and take corrective actions, as necessary, to ensure queue times are within the established standard.

Recommendation

3. **DCFS management monitor the effectiveness of the Rapid Response Team and take corrective actions, as necessary, to ensure queue times are within the established standard.**

Abandoned/Dropped Calls

The ACD system recognizes the termination of an incoming call (i.e., abandoned/dropped calls) and the point in the process when the call is terminated. The ACD records abandoned/dropped calls in one of three categories: 1) before the initial announcement (before a caller makes a menu selection); 2) after the announcement and options (a menu selection is made and the call is in queue); and 3) during the ring (a menu selection is made and the call is routed to a CSW). Statistics on the abandoned/dropped calls are kept on an hourly, daily, monthly and yearly basis. For

our baseline and review periods, the ACD recorded 5,591 and 3,553 Category 2 calls, respectively. For Category 2 calls, the Department's policy is to maintain abandoned/dropped calls at 3% or less. According to Hotline management, for Categories 1 and 3, no formal policy exists because callers can terminate their calls at anytime.

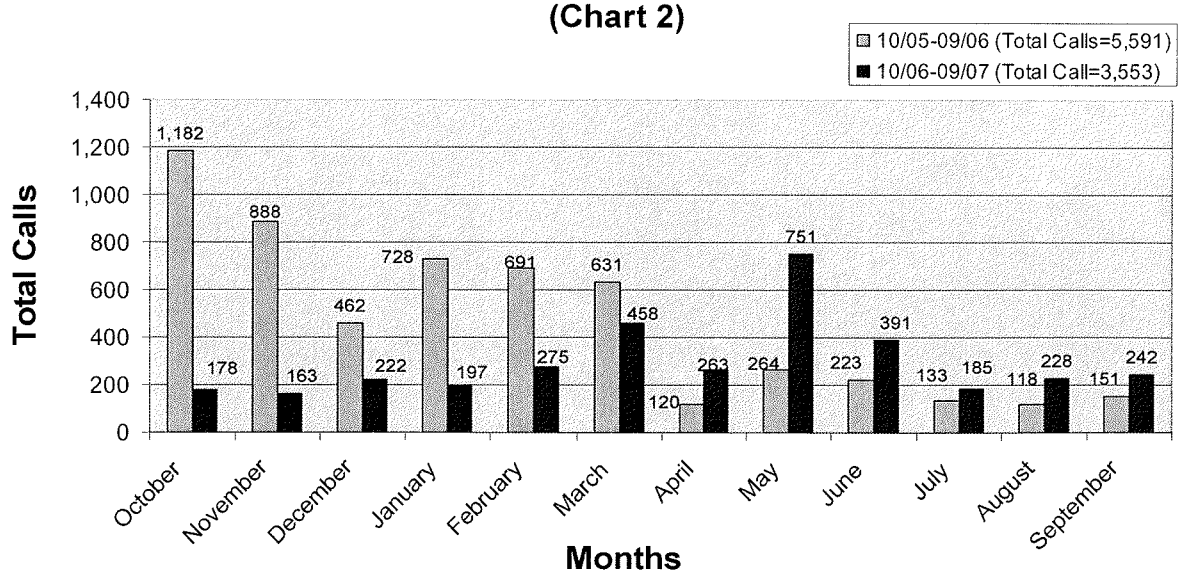
For Category 2 calls, Table 2 below shows a comparison by group while Chart 2 shows monthly abandoned/dropped calls.

Abandoned/Dropped Calls Comparison – Category 2
(Table 2)

	October 2005 - September 2006				October 2006 - September 2007			
Groups	Incoming Calls*	# Aband.	% Aband. (by group)	% Aband. (to total calls)	Incoming Calls*	# Aband.	% Aband. (by group)	% Aband. (to total calls)
Safe Haven	2,636	55	2.09%	0.03%	3,170	22	0.69%	0.01%
Consultation	60,553	1,946	3.21%	1.07%	52,212	607	1.16%	0.34%
English	101,887	2,500	2.45%	1.38%	97,235	1,866	1.92%	1.04%
Spanish	12,181	1,023	8.40%	0.57%	12,002	1,015	8.46%	0.56%
Supervisor	464	67	14.44%	0.04%	213	41	19.25%	0.02%
Overflow	3,313	0	0.00%	0.00%	15,121	2	0.01%	0.00%
Totals	**181,034**	**5,591**	**-**	**3.09%**	**179,953**	**3,553**	**-**	**1.97%**

*Represents total incoming calls

Abandoned/Dropped Calls by Month (Category 2)
(Chart 2)



Analysis

The anonymous allegation claims that cutbacks in staffing resulted in increases in abandoned/dropped calls at the beginning of calendar year 2007. We determined that the allegation has no merit.

For the review period October 2006 through September 2007, the number of abandoned/dropped calls (Category 2) decreased by 36%, from 5,591 to 3,553 (see Table 2). In addition, the number of Category 2 calls abandoned/dropped as a percentage of the total calls received also decreased from the prior year or from 3.09% to 1.97%. We did note a peak in abandoned/dropped calls during March and May 2007 that corresponds to the higher call volumes for those months. However, there was only a slight increase in abandoned/dropped calls for the review period.

Hotline management indicated that a variety of factors affect the Department's ability to answer all calls. Some of these factors include:

- Callers changing their mind about making a report
- Callers not willing to wait for their calls to be answered
- Callers not willing to use the automated callback feature when there is no available intake evaluator to take their calls
- Insufficient staffing during peak call volume
- Technical problems

Although there was an overall reduction in abandoned/dropped calls during our review period, the Supervisor and Spanish groups well exceeded the 3% standard as a percentage of the total calls within each respective group. Table 2 above shows that for the baseline and review periods, the percentage of abandoned/dropped calls for the Supervisor group was 14.44% and 19.25%, respectively, and the Spanish group was 8.40% and 8.46%, respectively. The high percentage within the Supervisor group correlates to the higher queue times for this group (see Table 1). Improvements in supervisor response times should help reduce the number of abandoned/dropped calls that likely occur due to the long wait times.

Hotline management acknowledged that there is a lack of Spanish speaking CSWs assigned to the Hotline. They believe this may have contributed to the number of abandoned calls for this call group. CPH management indicated they are currently working with SCSWs to improve in both these areas.

Recommendations

DCFS management:

4. **Take additional steps to reduce queue times for calls assigned to the Supervisor group with the goal of reducing abandoned/dropped calls.**

5. **Evaluate the need for additional bi-lingual CSWs (i.e., Spanish speakers) assigned to the Hotline.**

Callback Messaging System

The CPH receives reports of child abuse, neglect and exploitation 24 hours a day, every day. There are occasions throughout the day when the CPH call volume may exceed the number of CSWs available to receive those calls. When this occurs, the ACD routes the call to the "Overflow" group where SCSWs assigned to monitor Hotline computer screens will answer the calls. DCFS' procedures require SCSWs to obtain enough information from the caller so a referral can be generated or to take a callback message if they cannot resolve the call. If a callback message is taken, it is documented on a message slip that is given to a CSW to return the call. The Department's goal is to return all callback messages within 30 minutes of the SCSW documenting the callback message. Our review determined that DCFS does not always meet this goal.

For the review period, DCFS' 81 message books contained 3,534 message slips. We selected one slip from each book to review the Department's processing of callback messages and noted the following:

- Thirty-two messages were not returned by a CSW within the 30 minute standard.

- Ten of the 32 messages not returned within 30 minutes were from law enforcement personnel. These calls may involve children who are in the custody of the law enforcement personnel.

- The callback times ranged from 2 minutes to 3 hours and the message slips did not explain the reason for the delay. The average callback time, excluding law enforcement, was 35 minutes, while the average callback time to law enforcement was 29 minutes.

Our review of the message books/slips also disclosed that:

- CSW do not always return message slips to their SCSW after completing callbacks. For example, we noted that, for four message books, 46 message slips were missing.

- SCSWs do not always adequately document callback messages. For example, we noted callback messages that were missing the call date and time, and the caller's allegation(s) were not summarized in an understandable manner.

- CSWs do not always adequately document the action taken on callback messages. For example, we noted instances where the CSW documented that the mandated reporter could not be contacted because they had left work for the day. However, the CSWs did not document whether additional attempts, if any, were made to contact the mandated reporters.

- The message slips currently utilized by Hotline staff do not effectively prompt the workers to provide all necessary information (e.g., call date and time, summary of the allegation, actions taken, etc.). The Department should develop a template message slip to ensure callback messages are more adequately documented.

As a result, we could not always determine whether the CSW returned the calls, or whether the calls resulted in a report and referral of child abuse.

The Hotline's goal is to answer all calls as they are received. However, when call volume is high, and there are not enough CSWs to process the incoming calls, callback messages must be taken. To improve the timeliness in which callback telephone calls occur, DCFS management should consider establishing a unit whose sole function is to ensure the prompt and proper disposition of all callback messages. In addition, DCFS management should require SCSWs to increase their monitoring to ensure that all callback messages are returned within 30 minutes and are properly documented and dispositioned. DCFS management should also increase its monitoring to ensure callback activities meet departmental standards and, if not, initiate appropriate corrective action.

Recommendations

DCFS management:

6. **Consider establishing a unit whose sole function is to ensure the prompt and proper disposition of all callback messages.**

7. **Require SCSWs to increase their monitoring to ensure that all callback messages are returned within 30 minutes and are properly documented and dispositioned.**

8. **Increase its monitoring to ensure the Hotline's callback activities meet Departmental standards and, if not, initiate appropriate corrective action.**

9. **Develop a template callback message slip that prompts workers (e.g., time, date, description of allegation, etc.) to more adequately document callback messages.**

Additional Comment

As indicated above, the ACD routes all calls to an available CSW or the call remains in queue until a CSW is available to take the call. According to CPH management, if the ACD detects that the wait time will be longer than two minutes, the callback feature is offered to the caller. This feature allows the caller to enter their callback information (i.e., telephone number). When a CSW is available, the ACD calls back the caller while the CSW is on the line. If the caller chooses not to use the ACD's automatic callback feature, the call remains in queue until a worker takes the call. Currently, the callback feature is offered only once to the caller. There is no menu option to request a callback, should the caller change their mind, without redialing the Hotline.

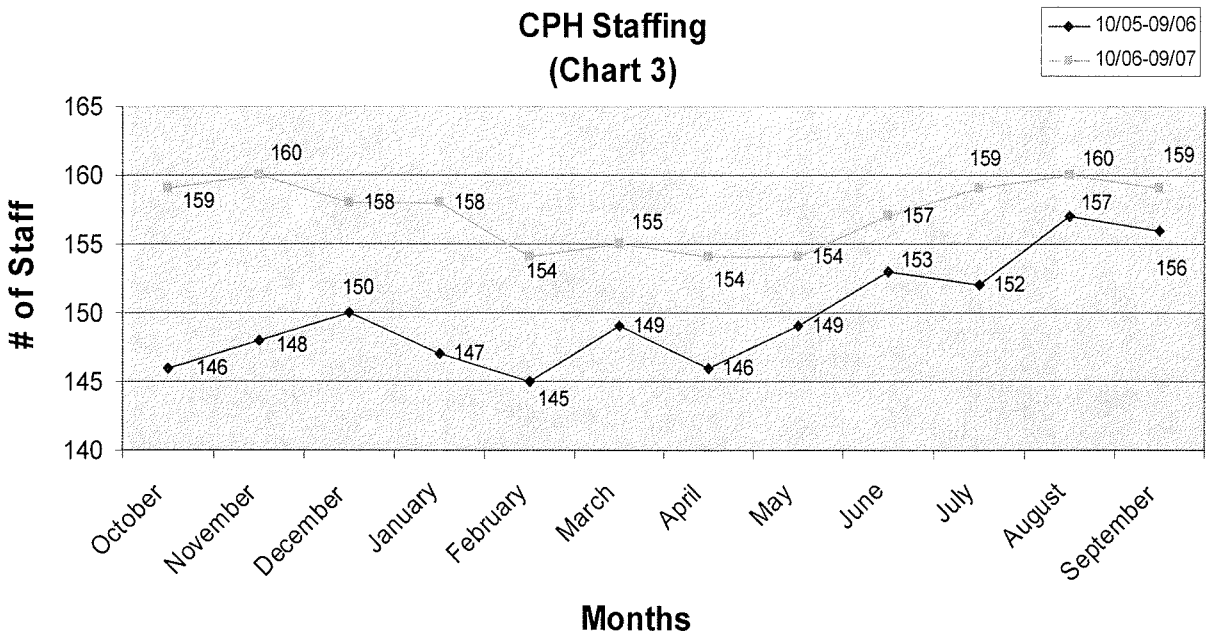
Recommendation

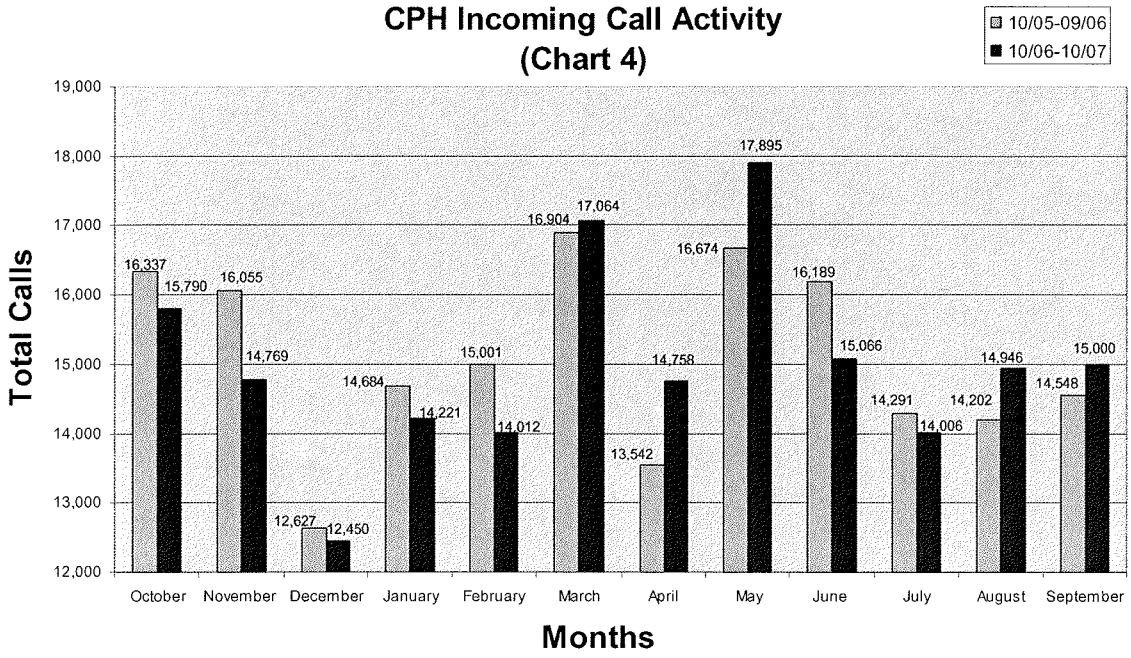
10. DCFS management consider modifying the ACD selection menu to allow callers to select the callback feature after the caller has been placed in a call group.

Hotline Staffing

As previously mentioned, the Hotline is a 24/7 operation and is budgeted at 142 CSW positions and 24 SCSW positions. The Hotline regularly uses overtime to supplement its staffing needs in order to help meet its workload demands.

Charts 3 and 4 below show the Hotline's monthly staffing and incoming calls, for both our baseline and review periods respectively.





Analysis

We determined that the Hotline's staffing remained fairly constant for both the baseline (ranging from 145 to 157) and review periods (ranging from 154 to 160). [1] We did not note any changes in Hotline staffing that would have significantly affected Hotline operations.

In addition, we interviewed CPH management to determine their methodology for scheduling Hotline staffing. Management indicated that they perform on-going reviews and trend analyses of call activity to determine appropriate staffing needs for each 24-hour period. Based on our review, the majority of staff is generally scheduled to work between 8:00 a.m. and 7:00 p.m., when most calls are received.

According to management, the above scheduling process applies to routine day-to-day operations. On occasion when media events related to child abuse awareness (e.g., movies, special news reports, reported abductions, high profile celebrity child abuse cases, etc.) make the headlines, management typically expects an increase in Hotline activity. As a result, management adjusts staffing resources accordingly (i.e., use of overtime) to accommodate the increase in activity. However, the Department has no formal protocol to notify CPH management when such media events occur.

Recommendation

11. DCFS management develop a formal protocol to notify CPH management timely of anticipated outside influences (e.g., media events, etc.) that may affect the volume of calls to the Hotline.

[1] Using eCAPS, we also confirmed that the CPH Salary and Employee Benefits expenditures were consistent on a month-to-month basis, which is further confirmation of the Hotline's staffing patterns.

Additional Comment

According to statements contained in the allegation letter, abandoned/dropped calls increased because of cutbacks in staffing at the beginning of 2007. Based on our review, there was only a slight increase in abandoned/dropped calls during early 2007, while overall staffing remained relatively constant throughout the entire review period. We did note that call volumes peaked during March and May 2007. Consequently, the increase in abandoned/dropped calls also peaked during these months. We were not able to substantiate the allegations that abandoned/dropped calls had increased because of cutbacks in staffing.

Recommendation

None

Quality Control

The Department disbanded its Quality Assurance Section in November 2002 and now relies on the daily monitoring of CPH activities by supervisors and managers, and its Hotline Quality Assurance Monitoring/Structured Decision-Making reviews to ensure CPH activities meet departmental performance standards. These quality control methods are described below:

- Call Center Monitoring

  On a daily basis, SCSWs monitor the floor activities of the CPH call center. The daily "CPH Floor Supervisor Work Flow Log" (Log) is completed hourly. The Log is used to assist the floor supervisor in monitoring call volume, abandoned/dropped calls, staffing (English and Spanish speaking), and caseload count (e.g., number of immediate referrals, information and consultation reports, etc.). This information is also available to supervisors and managers through their computer screens or from printed reports, which allow them to monitor the Hotline activities and personnel on a real-time basis.

- Structured Decision Making Reviews

  The Structured Decision-Making reports provide a daily/monthly status on how many referrals are being completed by each CSW and how many referrals are viewed/approved by each SCSW. These reports provide an overall monthly report on how the intake evaluators are doing in completing the tool.

In February 2007, DCFS management directed SCSWs to increase the number of telephone calls reviewed for all CSWs. They were required to initiate "Quality Assurance Telephone Call/Structured Decision Making Reviews" to ensure a random sampling of each worker's calls. The increased sampling – from one to three reviews of each worker per month – was conducted to identify staff that may be experiencing problems in interacting with callers and assessing information provided by callers.

Once the Assistant Regional Administrator and supervisor have identified staff with deficiencies, a corrective action plan is worked out with the employee. The plan may include one-on-one training being offered by the Assistant Regional Administrator and/or designated CSWs to correct deficiencies.

Conclusion

The above measures provide the Hotline with basic quality control mechanisms to monitor the Hotline's operations and to ensure intake workers meet departmental performance standards. We believe the recommendations contained in this report will supplement and help improve the Hotline's quality assurance activities. For example, Recommendation #7 requires increased SCSW monitoring of all callback messages, which will help ensure the prompt and proper disposition of messages left by callers.

Anonymous Allegations

In an anonymous letter to Supervisor Yvonne B. Burke, an informant alleged the following matters regarding Hotline operations:

- DCFS administrators have falsely reported child abuse statistics to mislead the Board of Supervisors and other, local, State and federal agencies. The false reporting involves thousands of cases and the misappropriation of hundreds of thousands of taxpayer dollars.

- Manual tallies of incoming calls bypassed the Department's automated telephone call system[2]. The CPH on-duty supervisor conducts hourly tallies of incoming calls and manually documents the number of calls taken and lost (i.e., abandoned/dropped). The tallies became CPH's official call processing log.

- Staffing cutbacks at the beginning of 2007 resulted in:
  - The manipulation of the call processing log.
  - The dropped call volume exceeding the acceptable level of 3% of total incoming calls.

- "Callbacks" are not calls taken, but the Department logs them as "calls processed" even though intake evaluators had not yet assessed the abuse reports from the Hotline callers, including calls from mandated reporters. The informant alleges that the manipulation occurs when the "calls in queue" light comes on and the on-duty supervisor is required to take a "callback message."

Conclusion

Generally, we determined that the allegations contained in the anonymous letter had no merit. We did not identify any instances where the Department falsely reported the Hotline's call figures. We did confirm that SCSWs do prepare hourly tallies of incoming

[2] We believe the informant is referring to the "Automatic Call Distributor (ACD)".

calls. According to the Department, the sole purpose of the tally is to help the SCSWs monitor the Hotline's "floor" activities. The ACD System is the Department's only official source for reporting Hotline call activity. In addition, ACD call data is used exclusively for internal monitoring/reporting purposes.

We also noted that the Department's ACD software access controls are adequate and are designed to prevent unauthorized system changes. According to ISD's ACD support staff, only he and the ACD maintenance vendor have passwords to access the System's computer software. Before software changes can be made, Hotline management must obtain approval from DCFS executive management and ISD information technology staff.

Our review also did not disclose any "manipulation" of call queue times. As previously discussed, SCSWs are required to monitor calls in queue and can either manually route calls to an available CSW, take enough information to generate a referral, or take a callback message if a CSW is not available and a detailed consultation is required. In our opinion, this process seems reasonable and helps ensure a timely response to callers. Furthermore, our review of the Hotline's call activity (see Table 1), showed only a one second increase on average in the Hotline's overall response time to calls in queue during our review period. We would have expected to see an improvement in the Hotline's overall response time if management was seeking to manipulate queue time statistics. However, the Department can improve its Callback System and recommendations for improvement are presented above.

Our review of the Hotline's staffing did not disclose any significant changes in staffing during our baseline and review periods. The Hotline's staffing generally remained constant from month-to-month, with a slight overall increase occurring during our review period. Based on our review, abandoned/dropped calls only slightly increased at the beginning of the year (see Chart 2). The increases in March and May 2007 were due to corresponding increases in total call volumes for those months.

We found no evidence of taxpayer dollars being misappropriated as alleged. In addition, it is unclear how the alleged misappropriation would occur as the Department's funding is not based on its reporting of Hotline activities.

Definitions - Allegation Types

A. *Child abuse* means the non-accidental commission of injuries against a person. In the case of a child, the term refers specifically to the non-accidental commission of injuries against the child by or allowed by a parent(s)/guardian(s) (or other person(s) in whom the court has vested care, custody, and control of the child). *The term includes emotional, physical, severe physical, and sexual abuse.*

B. *Exploitation* can be either sexual or non-sexual in nature:

   1) *Sexual exploitation* involves any person or person who is responsible for a child's welfare who knowingly promotes, aids or assists, employs, uses, persuades, induces or coerces a child, or knowingly permits or encourages a child to engage in, or assists others to engage in, prostitution or live performance involving obscene sexual conduct or to either pose or model alone or with others for the purpose of preparing a film, photograph, negative, slide, drawing, painting or other pictorial depiction involving obscene sexual conduct.

   2) *Non-sexual exploitation* involves forcing or coercing a child into performing acts which are beyond his/her capabilities, such as being employed for long hours and/or in a job which is dangerous or beyond his/her capabilities or forcing or coercing the child into illegal or degrading acts such as stealing, panhandling, and/or drug sales. Generally, these acts benefit the perpetrator in some way.

C. *Neglect* means the negligent treatment or maltreatment of a child by acts or omissions by a person responsible for the child's welfare under circumstances indicating harm or threatened harm to the child's health or welfare, including physical and/or psychological endangerment. *The term includes both severe and general neglect.*

D. *Substantial risk* applies to situations in which: no clear, current allegations exist for the child; and the child appears to need preventative services based on a family history of physical, emotional, sexual abuse and/or general/severe neglect which places the child at risk for abuse and/or neglect.

E. *Caretaker absence/incapacity* is specific to the caregiver's situation rather than to the child's and may be used in addition to general neglect or substantial risk of harm allegations. This allegation type shall be used in either of the following circumstances:

   1) *Caretaker absence*: The child's parent has been incarcerated, hospitalized or institutionalized and cannot arrange for the care of the child; parent's whereabouts are unknown or the custodian with whom the child has been left is unable or unwilling to provide care and support for the child.

   2) *Caretaker incapacity*: The child's parent or guardian is unable to provide adequate care for the child due to the parent or guardian's mental illness, developmental disability or substance abuse.

County of Los Angeles
DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES

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PATRICIA S. PLOEHN, LCSW
Director

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January 11, 2008

To: J. Tyler McCauley
Auditor-Controller

From: Patricia S. Ploehn, LCSW
Director

RESPONSE TO CHILD PROTECTION HOTLINE REVIEW

Thank you for the opportunity to review the draft report of the Auditor-Controller's review of the Department of Children and Family Services' (DCFS) Child Protection Hotline operations.

We agree with all of the recommendations contained in the report and implemented a number of corrective actions as your staff brought issues to our attention. In the near future, we will provide the Board a detailed report on our progress in implementing the recommendations identified in the report.

I would like to thank you for the level of staff resources you devoted to helping DCFS to improve its operations. As always, it has been a pleasure working with your staff.

If you have any questions, please let me know, or your staff may contact Eric Marts, Deputy Director, Service Bureau 2, at (213) 639-4784.

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