

**“Redundancy and Duplication in Child Welfare Programs:
A Case Study on the Need for Executive Reorganization Authority”**

Opening Statement of Chairman Davis

Committee on Government Reform

May 20, 2003 at 10:00 a.m.

2154 Rayburn House Office Building

Good morning and thank you for coming. The purpose of today’s hearing is to gain an understanding of the wide range of federal agencies and programs responsible for protecting and caring for our Nation’s most vulnerable citizens – abused and neglected children. The Committee’s primary interest is to determine the extent to which overlap and duplication among federal child abuse and neglect programs creates inefficiencies and hinders overall effectiveness. In turn, we are also interested in exploring the need to reinstate Presidential Executive Reorganization Authority as a tool to cut through the redundancy of the federal bureaucracy, with the area of child abuse and neglect program just one obvious example of the organizational maze we face.

There is too much at stake for us to accept a scattershot governmental structure. There are 542,000 children in this country in foster care. The number of children with a parent in a federal or state correctional facility increased from 900,000 to 2 million between 1991 and 1999. We have an obligation to help provide the care and stability these children are missing.

The bottom line is that the legislative branch is not an effective manager of the federal government. Rather than formulating policy, authorizing spending and overseeing federal initiatives, the legislative branch all too often inserts itself into program administration by establishing niche programs to address niche needs. In the realm of federal child abuse and neglect, Congress has established more than 50 individual programs spread throughout 4 Cabinet-level departments. All are focused in some way on the important issue of protecting abused children, but how much effectiveness is lost due to lack of coordination across agencies? We have to ask: can we do better?

As the President stated in his Management Agenda, “Government likes to begin things – to declare grand new programs and causes. But good beginnings are not the measure of success. What matters in the end is completion. Performance. Results. Not just making promises, but making good on promises.”

That is the problem we face here today. Over the past three decades, Congress has created 51 federal programs, spread across the Departments of Health and Human Services, Justice, Agriculture, and Education, to deal with the problem of child abuse and neglect. These 51 federal child abuse and neglect prevention programs fall under a bigger umbrella of 339 federal programs that the recent White House Task Force for Disadvantaged Youth identified as playing a role in the general field of child welfare.

Considering that the federal government’s primary role in child welfare is to administer grants to state, local and non-profit agencies – these are the organizations that actually provide services to the children – the sheer number of federal programs involved should be troubling to

all, including the agencies administering them. I would be remiss if I failed to mention that Congress is guilty here, too, because we tie the hands of many of these agencies by earmarking hundreds of millions of dollars for specific programs through the appropriations process. Earmarks are often an important source of federal funding for valuable programs, but they should not take the place of the expertise available at the agencies themselves.

I think two of the findings from the October 2003 Report from the White House Task Force for Disadvantaged Youth are especially noteworthy. First, the report concluded that “the current federal response to disadvantaged youth is a perfect example of ‘mission fragmentation.’” We’re doing too many similar things in too many different places.

The second conclusion of note is that federal agencies must be responsible for effectively stewarding child welfare initiatives as authorized by Congress. The Task Force Report found that “mission creep” within agencies administering child welfare programs has led to “a haphazard response and a lack of rationality that these serious and complex problems demand.” Just because Congress has authorized these programs in various agencies doesn’t let federal managers off the hook. The people administering these programs must effectively shepherd the programs under their responsibility and make sure their programs are focused on accomplishing outcomes and results, not building turf.

The federal agency witnesses here today will explain how their individual programs and offices fit into the elaborate patchwork of federal child abuse and neglect prevention efforts, as well as efforts being made to improve coordination. I do not doubt the sincerity or intentions of a single federal employee who has dedicated his or her life to promoting the welfare of our children, and that holds true for the witnesses before us today. But the question still remains: Is the current structure the most effective framework for protecting our most vulnerable citizens? I would imagine the witnesses before us today have some ideas and I look forward to hearing from them.

That brings me to the second purpose for this hearing. There have already been a great number of reports, studies, commissions, and task forces looking at ways to improve the organization and effectiveness of federal programs, both in the area of child welfare and across the entire government. In my opinion, we know the answer by now: It is time to return to the President the authority to initiate reorganizations within the Executive Branch, and to have them subject to an up-or-down vote in Congress. Waiting for Congress to come to agreement and initiate such a reorganization could take years and would inevitably get bogged down in jurisdictional battles. These are years that children receiving federal care do not have.

I’m very pleased to have Majority Leader Tom DeLay, a longtime champion of disadvantaged children and advocate of government reorganization, to start us off today. In addition, we will hear testimony from a number of distinguished government witnesses.

Wade Horn, the Assistant Secretary for Children and Families at the Department of Health and Human Services, will testify on behalf of all of the child abuse and neglect prevention programs located within the Children and Families Administration, the Office of the Secretary,

the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the National Institutes of Health, and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

Robert Flores, the Administrator of the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention at the Department of Justice, will testify on the efforts to prevent child abuse and neglect in the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, the Bureau of Justice Assistance, the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the Office of Victims of Crime, the National Institute for Justice, and the Violence Against Women Office.

Colien Hefferan, the Administrator for the Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service at the Department of Agriculture, will discuss the Children, Youth and Families at Risk Program at the Department of Agriculture.

The Department of Education will unfortunately not be joining us this morning to discuss the Department's efforts to protect at-risk youth through the Safe and Drug Free Schools initiatives and the Grants for Infants and Families, but the Department committed to looking into the matter and reporting back to the Committee on the results of their findings.

I welcome all of the witnesses to today's hearing and I look forward to their testimony.