

# **EXHIBIT 3**



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# Report: Indiana putting children in foster care at twice national rate

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Indiana removes children from their homes and places them in state care at more than twice the national average rate, a consultant reviewing the state's embattled child welfare agency said Thursday.

That's one of two primary findings by the Child Welfare Policy and Practice Group, which was hired by Gov. Eric Holcomb to conduct a review of the Indiana Department of Children's Services. The other "challenge" outlined in a preliminary report is that the state uses an inadequate computer system to track child welfare cases.

"Taking a child out of his or her family is a very consequential decision for children and for families," said consultant Sue D. Steib. "They are the responsibility of the state rather than being home with their families."

The number of U.S. children placed in foster care has surged as states struggle to address the opioid epidemic and help addicted parents who can't care for their children. But the problem is particularly acute in a handful of states, including Indiana.

That's fueled a skyrocketing number child welfare cases that have stretched the DCS thin, advocates say. They describe an agency in perpetual triage where caseworkers have no choice but to cut corners.

The national average of children placed in out-of-home state care is 5.5 per 1,000, but in Indiana the number is about 13 children per 1,000, Steib said. It's a population that has also doubled to 16,834 in Indiana since 2012, according to the report.

In December, the agency's former director resigned and wrote a critical resignation letter that accused Holcomb's administration of service cuts and management changes that "all but ensure children will die."

"I choose to resign, rather than be complicit in decreasing the safety, permanency and well-being of children who have nowhere else to turn," wrote Mary Beth Bonaventura, a former juvenile judge who then-Gov. Mike Pence appointed to lead the agency five years ago.

Holcomb called for an agency review in the fallout and pledged transparency. The report issued Thursday outlines steps the consultants will take to conduct their review in the coming months. But the administration has raised more questions than answers.

Holcomb's new child welfare chief, Terry Stigdon, declined to comment Thursday on whether the agency faces problems.

Stigdon said she had not read her predecessor's resignation letter, which included a detailed critique of the Holcomb administration's handling of the agency. She also declined to say whether she agreed with Republicans in the Legislature, who have concluded that the agency faces systemic problems.

When asked if the Indiana's child welfare system needs fixing, she responded: "that's an interesting question."

Later she added: "While I may do things differently, it doesn't necessarily mean that something is broken."

Stigdon says she is working on her own assessment and repeatedly invoked her short tenure on the job while avoiding questions. Jane Jankowski, a top Holcomb staffer, threatened to cut a media briefing short unless questions were focused solely on the preliminary report.

"It's hard to have any thoughts this early," Stigdon said.

The Child Welfare Policy and Practice Group launched its review Jan. 3. It pledged to conduct an extensive review, including interviews with people throughout the agency and child welfare system.

The group is being paid a maximum of \$146,630 for its work, according to the contract. It expects to complete work sometime in June.