November 6, 2007

To: Brent Platt, Western Region Director

From: Western Region Quality Improvement Committee

cc: Duane Betournay, DCFS Director

Our committee has been reviewing data regarding the recruitment, training, and licensing of new foster homes in Western region during our meetings over the past several months. We have become concerned about the increasing number of children in care and the decreasing number of foster homes available to us. On March 30, 2007 Western region had 399 children in care, and a total of 268 licensed foster homes. On September 30, 2007, the region had 456 children in care, and 263 licensed foster homes. A major concern is the length of time the licensing process is taking and the number of homes we might be losing because of the time delay. We believe that unless action is taken to address issues identified with the licensing of homes, the region will quickly find itself in crisis that spills over into all aspects of agency operations.

We do not wish this to be viewed as an attack on any agency that is part of this process, but rather as an attempt to look for both short and long term solutions. We have every reason to believe that the Office of Licensing and the Utah Foster Care Foundation are doing their utmost to recruit, train, and license a qualified, caring, and competent pool of foster homes. But it seems clear that the system, as it is currently set up, is not capable of meeting the needs of the region. We have attached the data that we believe supports this belief.

We have discussed the different aspects of the licensing process and considered everything we could think of. We are making three different recommendations for you to respond to. It is our hope that one or more of these recommendations will help you to help us resolve this concern before it becomes a crisis.

Authorize Additional monies so that the Office of Licensing can hire additional licensors.

In Western Region, there are three licensors in Provo, and one in Nephi. They are responsible for processing the paperwork and completing the home studies on all new foster homes. They must also complete home study updates on all foster homes for license renewal annually, complete updates when a foster family moves, and authorize variances. They are responsible for dealing with violations of licensing rules that occur in both foster homes and residential facilities. Finally, they are responsible for licensing and updating the licenses of residential facilities. Clearly, this is a workload impossible for four people to complete in a timely manner.

Authorize staff within DCFS to assist the Office of Licensing with home studies of new foster homes.

Potential foster homes have some of their paperwork completed by the time they finished the required training. Background checks for families that have not lived outside the state of Utah are completed fairly quickly, usually within two weeks. Families that have lived out of state within the past five years are taking 2-3 months to clear. Then, they often wait months before their home studies are completed. Many families decide that the Division must not need foster homes after all, since the licensing process is so slow. They often decide that they don't wish to foster after all, a huge loss in terms of time and money invested in the training.

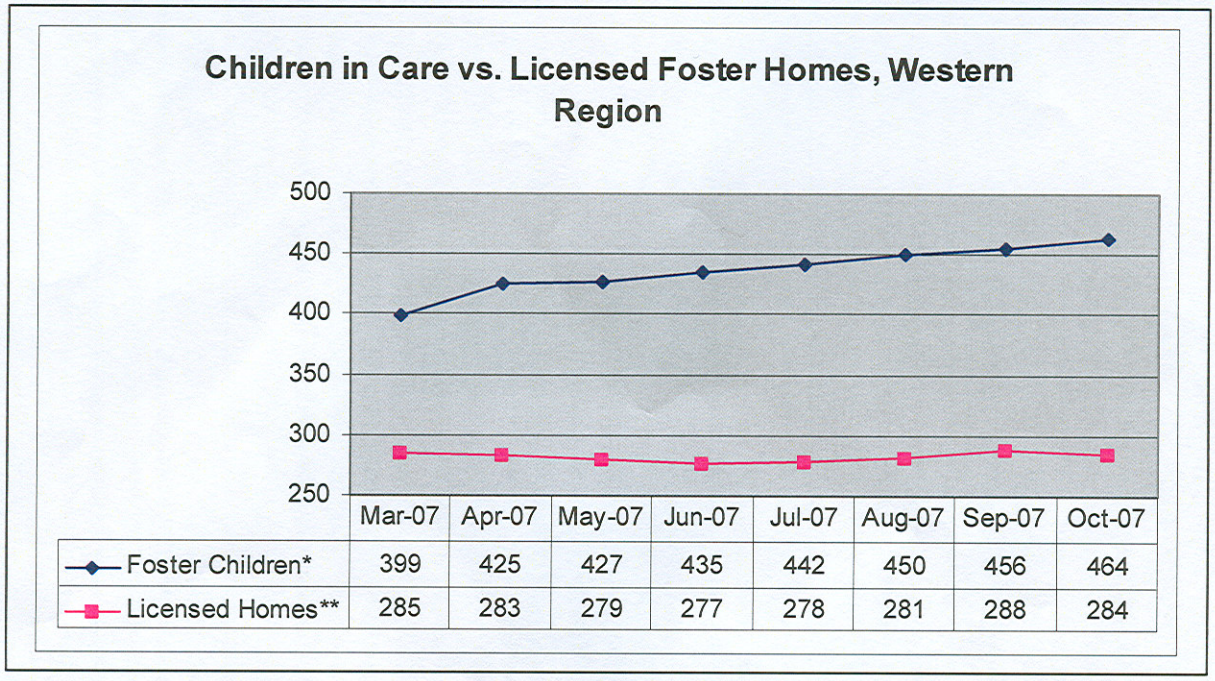
We propose that the Office of Licensing have a set time after paperwork and background checks are completed to do the home study. If they are not able to do it within the determined time frame (one month?), then Division staff would be authorized to do the home study and submit it to the Office of Licensing. Licensing would then have a set timeframe within which to determine if the family meets the criteria for licensure. DCFS staff are already completing home studies of families pursuing licensing so that they can have a relative's child placed with them; we request that the ability to do the home studies be expanded beyond kinship families.

Review the statutes and rules governing the licensure of foster parents to determine if our current system is the most effective and efficient way to complete this process.

Utah is the only state in the country where the licensing function is separate from the functions of the child-placing agency. It is confusing to potential foster parents, who see the Utah Foster Care Foundation, Division of Child and Family Services, and the Office of Licensing as one government entity. This split system creates barriers where none need to exist. We believe that the Department of Human Services should thoroughly evaluate the pros and cons of bringing the responsibility for the licensing of foster parents back under the Division. We recognize that this would require changes in our current statutes by the Legislature.

We would be happy to dialogue more on ways to solve the problem of licensing homes for foster care and any thing in the recommendations that we are making. Thank you for all you do and we look forward to hearing from you soon.

Western Region QI Committee



	Mar-07	Apr-07	May-07	Jun-07	Jul-07	Aug-07	Sep-07	Oct-07
Foster Children*	399	425	427	435	442	450	456	464
Licensed Homes**	285	283	279	277	278	281	288	284

* The number of foster children is a point in time, taken on the 30th day of the month.

**Number of licensed foster homes on the 30th day of the month, from SAFE.