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Office of the County Auditor

**Shelly A. Banks, C.P.A.**

Cook County Auditor

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October 3, 2016

The Honorable Toni Preckwinkle, President  
And Board of Cook County Commissioners  
118 N. Clark Street, Room 537  
Chicago, Illinois 60602

Dear President Preckwinkle and Board of Commissioners:

We have conducted an audit of the Department of Adoption and Family Supportive Services (DAFSS). We conducted our audit in accordance with the [Cook County Auditor Ordinance](#).

Our objectives for this examination were to assess the internal control procedures for the home study investigations process of the DAFSS for fiscal years 2014 and 2015.

Please refer to the following audit report for the results of the audit. The audit report contains seven control improvements. The [Executive Summary](#) provides an overview of the audit with the main control improvement areas.

We express our appreciation for the assistance of the DAFSS staff extended to Ms. Julie Stack during the course of our audit. We have discussed the control improvements with the DAFSS staff and would be pleased to discuss further or to assist the DAFSS with any additional implementations.

Respectfully Submitted,

Shelly A. Banks, CPA  
Cook County Auditor

cc: Ms. Martha Martinez, Chief Administrative Officer, Bureau of Administration  
Ms. Margaret LaRaviere, Director, Adoption & Family Supportive Services



COOK COUNTY GOVERNMENT  
OFFICE OF THE COUNTY AUDITOR

Department of Adoption and Family Supportive Services

Internal Audit Report

Report Date:  
October 2016

Issued By:  
Shelly A. Banks, County Auditor

Audit Conducted By:  
Julie Stack, Field Auditor V

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Office of the Cook County Auditor (OCA) has conducted an audit in regards to the Department of Adoption and Family Supportive Services Home Study Investigation Process for the fiscal year 2014 and 2015.

The mission of the Department of Adoption and Family Supportive Services (DAFSS) is to serve the welfare and best interests of families involved in independent adoptions, probate and child custody hearings through the submission of social study reports that include family history, medical well-being, family observations, and recommendations to the Court.

Under the Illinois Marriage and Dissolution of Marriage Act, which has been revised and renumbered from (750 ILCS 5/605 to 750 ILCS 5/600-5/611 effective 1/1/16), the department is ordered to conduct social study investigations in contested custody proceedings pursuant to a request by the Court, parents and/or relevant parties. Under the Illinois Adoption Statute (750 ILCS 50/6), within 10 days after the filing of a petition for adoption or standby adoption of a child (other than a related child) the court may appoint the Department of Adoption and Family Supportive Services to investigate the allegation in the petition; the character, reputation, health and general standing of petitioners; identify the religious faith of petitioners and if possible of the adoptee, and to ascertain whether the petitioners and child are proper for adoption.

The scope and objectives of the DAFSS Audit were to assess the internal control procedures for the home study investigations process for fiscal years 2014 and 2015.

The OCA worked with the DAFSS to develop and implement the following control improvements to the internal control structure:

- Established a formalized electronic Procedural and Practice Guidelines Manual.
- Instituted a process for the caseworkers to track their daily case time by categories, for example: travel, interview preparation, interview, case research and report writing.
- Reinforced the travel policy requirements with all caseworkers and included a link in the new Procedural and Practice Guidelines Manual to the Cook County Transportation Policy.
- Restructuring report formats to more user friendly report templates in lieu of typing an extensive narrative.
- Established a practice where caseworkers are more accountable for their time by working at a Cook County location rather than working from home once an interview is completed.
- Developing a more efficient interview scheduling process.
- Working with the Bureau of Technology (BOT) on an improved case management solution to include the business requirements for edit checks, alerts, confirmations and improved reporting metrics.

The control improvements noted were presented and discussed with DAFSS and Bureau of Administration (BOA) Management. Please refer to the [Control Improvements](#) Section for more detail on the improvements.

## BACKGROUND

Under the Illinois Marriage and Dissolution of Marriage Act, the Department of Adoption and Family Supportive Services (DAFSS) conducts investigations and submits written reports to the Court. The purpose is to ensure that all necessary information is available to the Court in determining the best interests of the child. These home study investigations address independent adoption placements, and disputes regarding parenting time and child custody/parental responsibility issues regarding domestic relations, parentage cases, and probate (minors).

When a dispute arises in the Domestic Relation, Municipal and Probate Divisions of the Circuit Court regarding custody or visitation of children, the Court may order the Department to conduct a home study evaluation of the involved parties: parents, step-parents, children, guardians, and extended family members.

In fiscal year 2015, DAFSS received 425 cases, of which 413 or 97% were Custody and Probate cases and 12 or 3% were Adoption cases. Custody and Probate cases are to be completed within 90 days of receiving the Court Order from the Judge. From the time the Court Order was received until the time the case was closed and report issued to the Judge, averaged 92 days in fiscal year 2015, for Custody and Probate cases.

## AUDIT SCOPE AND OBJECTIVES

Our objectives were designed to assess the internal control procedures of the Cook County Department of Adoption and Family Supportive Services for the two years ended November 30, 2015. Our objectives were to analyze and evaluate that:

- The home study investigations process is operating in the most effective and efficient manner with the proper internal controls.
- Written policies and procedures are in place to establish proper controls and support the investigation process.
- Proper documentation exists to support the travel reimbursements.

## CONTROL IMPROVEMENTS

During the audit, the Office of County Auditor (OCA) made several recommendations for control improvements to the Department of Adoption and Family Supportive Services (DAFSS). The DAFSS was receptive to the control improvements and worked with the OCA to move forward with implementation. The OCA will follow up on the control improvements to verify the implementation and provide any further assistance to DAFSS to ensure implementation.

### **Control Improvement #1:**

The DAFSS did not have a formalized electronic Procedures Manual. The OCA worked with the DAFSS to create a formalized electronic DAFSS Procedural and Practice Guidelines Manual that could be uploaded into the Evolve Case Management System to be easily accessible by all staff. The manual is organized to establish internal controls and clearly define the Department's practices, procedures, roles and responsibilities.

**Control Improvement #2:**

Caseworkers' project time was not tracked to properly account for all time spent on a case. DAFSS' goal is to submit completed reports within 90 days to the judge. Tracking the casework time is an important component to ensuring the timely delivery of the case report to the judge. The department tracks the dates from when the court order was received to the date the case report is sent to the judge, but does not require the caseworkers to track the specific time put into each case (i.e. travel time, preparation time, interview time, and report writing).

OCA created a project time tracking database so DAFSS can institute a process for the caseworkers to allocate their daily time to categories, for example: travel, interview preparation, interview, case research and report writing. The time tracking per case will provide for better management of cases and benchmarking. DAFSS has stated that the database will be implemented on October 1, 2016.

**Control Improvement #3:**

Travel reimbursements were not in accordance with the Cook County Transportation Policy. Per the Cook County Transportation Policy, Section II Paragraph B. Temporary and Minor Assignments (residence to temporary duty point): Employees who are required to perform County business in the form of temporary and minor assignments beyond the general area of their regular place of assignment in the County may be reimbursed for their transportation expenses between home and their first **OR** last stop, for such travel attributed to County business. In addition, Section II Paragraph D. General Guidelines 2. Employees must bear the cost of their normal commuting expenses between residence and official place of assignment. DAFSS was reimbursing caseworkers' mileage for the entire commute from home to interview site and back to their home.

DAFSS included a link in the new Procedural and Practice Guidelines Manual to the Cook County Transportation Policy and has reinforced the travel policy requirements with all caseworkers. In addition, the improved Transportation Expense Voucher System (TEVS) has edits to ensure the proper calculation for mileage reimbursements and that caseworkers are compensated for travel reimbursement according to the Cook County Transportation Policy.

**Control Improvement #4:**

To make the reporting more user friendly, the OCA developed suggested report templates to include the main heading fields with fillable fields and checkboxes in lieu of typing an extensive narrative. The report templates will improve the timeliness of report writing as well as assist the caseworkers in the field by providing a format where data can be easily captured. Utilizing the report templates along with the work laptop will improve the caseworkers' productivity in conducting the interviews and finalizing the reports. The report templates also provide an easier format for external parties to review and identify the key points as well as any concerns. DAFSS is reviewing the templates to make additional changes for best practices and will have new templates fully implemented by November 30, 2016.

**Control Improvement #5:**

DAFSS established a practice where caseworkers are more accountable for their time by working at a Cook County location rather than working from home once an interview is completed. The practice requires that the caseworkers "must complete the rest of scheduled work hours at Director/Deputy Director pre-approved Cook County location such as the Cook County Law Library or any other pre-agreed upon location". The practice will improve productivity and a more timely preparation of the case reports.

**Control Improvement #6:**

Caseworkers schedule their own interviews, which can be a time consuming process, especially when the caseworkers are working on preparing the case. Establishing a central scheduling function to schedule and track the interviews would allow the caseworkers to focus their time on the actual casework. DAFSS stated that with current resources it would be difficult to establish a central scheduling process, but that they will continue to explore opportunities for improving the scheduling process. DAFSS stated other scheduling areas would be improved such as ensuring the clients are given the department's general phone number to connect with the administrative assistant when needing to reschedule or connect with the caseworker and adding as a requirement with a new case management system to have alert reminders sent to the interviewees to confirm the interview. Until an automated alert can be set up, DAFSS will confirm the interviews with the interviewees a day prior.

**Control Improvement #7:**

The current case management system lacks controls, which affects the management of the cases and the timeliness of the reports. When analyzing the data in the current case management system, there were key fields that were not consistently updated. There are no edit checks within the current system to ensure key fields are updated prior to closing a case. In addition, there are key fields in the system that are completed but cannot be extracted into a report to be utilized for properly managing case time and workloads. There are also no automatic reminders to interviewees to confirm interview dates and times.

DAFSS is working with the Bureau of Technology (BOT) on an improved case management solution to include the business requirements for edit checks, alerts, confirmations and improved reporting metrics.

Until a new case management system, DAFSS has reinforced with the caseworkers the importance of updating all key fields prior to submitting the final report. DAFSS Director/Deputy Director will also ensure key fields are updated prior to approving the final report. In addition, DAFSS is working with the current vendor on fixing the interview dates in the system so that they can immediately start utilizing this data in managing the cases and reporting performance metrics.