

# Strategic Plan

## SFY 2017-2018



**Legal  
Services**



# DHS STRATEGY MAP

## SFY 2017-2018

### OUR MISSION

We improve the quality of life of vulnerable Oklahomans by increasing people's ability to lead safer, healthier, more independent and productive lives.

### OUR VISION

DHS provides help and offers hope to vulnerable Oklahomans through stronger practices, involved communities and a caring and engaged workforce.

### OUR VALUES

Safety • Integrity • Professionalism • Compassion



Figure 1. SFY 2017-2018 Strategy Map

## A Letter from the General Counsel

It is deliberate that the vision underlying implementation of this strategic plan is for DHS Legal Services to be as proactive as possible. While it remains the role of this office to respond with timely and accurate advice and counsel, members of DHS Legal Services have also accepted the challenge to identify and proactively address those issues with the potential to unnecessarily jeopardize the health, safety, and welfare of vulnerable Oklahomans. Through this plan, DHS Legal Services wants to put practices into place that not only identify issues before they become problems, this office will also strive to develop and offer solutions.

In many respects, all paths within DHS lead to or through the office of DHS Legal Services. This is a responsibility that should not be taken lightly. Every worker within the agency should be made aware of the role DHS Legal Services plays and understand its purpose is to provide assistance, offer advice, and ensure the agency and its workers maintain the highest ethical principles and remain securely within the boundaries of the law. Every DHS worker has the opportunity to speak and interact directly with an attorney in DHS Legal Services. This may mean representation during an active lawsuit, answering an inquiry to find out more about the requirements of the Indian Child Welfare Act, providing advice to remain compliant with the Family and Medical Leave Act, or obtaining a guardianship to protect a vulnerable adult who is being abused, neglected or exploited.

DHS Legal Services can only help the agency improve if it strives to improve in its own right. Whether it is undertaking incremental steps that benefit the performance of a single employee or adopting revolutionary change that alters the very operations of the office, DHS Legal Services becomes stronger only through demonstrable and measurable steps to improve from within.

This Strategic Plan coupled with the agency's Quality Service Standards serve as the guideposts DHS Legal Services intends to follow for the next two years and beyond. I look forward to the challenges that come with tackling these issues head-on and applaud this office and the agency it serves as they embrace this opportunity for positive change.

**Ron E. Baze**

General Counsel, Legal Services Division

## ***DIVISION OVERVIEW***

When considering the overwhelming size and scope of the Oklahoma Department of Human Services, it's no surprise the agency must function with what amounts to its own full-time law firm to provide advice, counsel and other legal services. DHS Legal Services is capable of assisting the agency and its employees in every facet of the agency's mission. The agency's General Counsel oversees a division of attorneys and support staff who must keep up with a daunting amount of ever-changing laws, rules and regulations governing the social services provided in Oklahoma.

The attorneys and support staff that make up the DHS Legal Services team field a steady stream of questions every single day as DHS employees work to protect this state's vulnerable adults and children, and provide benefits to thousands of Oklahomans struggling with their day-to-day needs. Their questions touch upon just about every program and service offered by the agency. The DHS Legal Services team is called upon to:

- Address the daily issues that arise as DHS operates Oklahoma's child welfare system
- Provide advice to those DHS staff tasked with protecting the state's vulnerable adults and the developmentally disabled
- Assist efforts to place individuals who abuse, neglect or exploit vulnerable adults and children on statewide no-hire registries
- Assist in determinations of eligibility for Oklahomans seeking the full range of benefits, from Medicaid waivers to child care subsidies
- Review and analyze the thousands of contracts and business agreements entered into every year by the agency

In addition to providing advice and counsel, DHS Legal Services prosecutes cases and provides representation in courtrooms and hearing rooms in every corner of the state. Attorneys are also on hand to ensure the agency remains compliant with its obligations under the Fair Labor Standards Act, the Family and Medical Leave Act and other federal laws.

Finally, DHS Legal Services is responsible for operating the third largest court system within the state. The Office of Administrative Hearings: Child Support employs a team of clerks and administrative law judges who function to administer those hearings that determine paternity and child support obligations to ensure Oklahoma children have the financial support they need.

DHS Legal Services may not come into direct contact with those served each day by DHS, but the efforts of this division are critical when it comes to ensuring every vulnerable Oklahoman is protected and provided those benefits they need to stay safe and secure.



***OUTCOME 1: We help Oklahomans who are vulnerable lead safer, healthier, more independent and productive lives.***

***Goal 1: We will improve the well-being of the people we serve.***

***Objective 1: Beginning July 2016, we will advise agency employees who serve clients of publicly available legal services and information.***

**Action Plan:**

**By July 2016,** we will gather publicly available legal materials and information to enhance the effectiveness of employee training opportunities.

**Beginning August 2016,** we will engage DHS employees at all training opportunities to advise them of publicly available legal services that can then be communicated to members of the public, as appropriate.

**By October 2016,** we will ensure accurate and updated legal resources available to the public are incorporated into the resource list created by the Office of Communication and Community Engagement.

**By December 2016,** we will update the Legal Services Infonet page with new materials for existing, publicly available legal services and information.

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**Important Results:**

- The increased knowledge of front-line staff regarding publicly available legal services and information
- The increased knowledge of DHS service recipients regarding publicly available legal services and information to address their needs

***OUTCOME 1: Oklahomans lead safer, healthier, more independent and productive lives.***

***Goal 2:*** We will improve access to our services and benefits.

***Objective 1:*** Beginning July 2016, we will improve efforts to communicate Legal Services' roles and responsibilities as they pertain to the Department of Human Services.

***Action Plan:***

**By October 2016,** we will update, develop and disseminate a detailed informational brochure outlining the functions of the division.

**By October 2016,** we will develop and adopt an on-boarding resource for new DHS employees.

**By October 2016,** we will enhance the Connections training to better inform new employees of the role and responsibilities of Legal Services.

**By December 2016,** we will update the Legal Services Infonet and internet pages to provide most commonly requested information and services.

**By January 2017,** we will develop and implement the Legal Advice Representation and Assistance (LARA) electronic request form to provide DHS employees a means of accessing advice and counsel from Legal Services.

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***Important Results:***

- The increased knowledge of new employees regarding the role and responsibilities of Legal Services and how to request assistance
- The improved ease of access for requesting assistance from Legal Services

**OUTCOME 2: Our workforce is informed, supported and engaged.**

**Goal 1:** We will promote safe, healthy work environments.

**Objective 1:** Beginning July 2016, we will utilize peer-to-peer sharing to increase our knowledge on healthy living tips and suggestions in order to improve physical and mental well-being.

**Action Plan:**

**Beginning July 2016,** on at least a monthly basis, one member of DHS Legal Services will volunteer or be chosen to develop and disseminate a healthy living tip on the topic of his or her choice.

**By June 2018,** we will continue to assess knowledge gaps and identify existing resources to address those gaps to improve safety and well-being in the workplace.

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**Important Results:**

- Legal Services employees report improved access to health and safety information
- Legal Service employees report increased knowledge of health and safety issues



***OUTCOME 2: Our workforce is informed, supported and engaged.***

***Goal 2:*** We will improve the effectiveness of our workforce.

***Objective 1:*** Beginning July 2016, we will identify and address the information needs of DHS staff by developing and disseminating training materials on recurring legal topics.

***Action Plan:***

**By September 2016,** we will develop and disseminate an Administrative Hearing Handbook.

**By November 2016,** we will update or identify training materials regarding proper courtroom and hearing etiquette and being an effective witness.

**By December 2016,** we will update the Legal Services Infonet page with new training materials for existing legal services and information.

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***Important Results:***

- The increased knowledge for DHS staff regarding various legal topics
- The increased knowledge for DHS staff regarding how to access DHS Legal Services

***OUTCOME 2: Our workforce is informed, supported and engaged.***

***Goal 3:*** We will continue to improve employee engagement.

***Objective 1:*** Beginning July 2016, we will engage agency employees at all levels of the organization to provide feedback to Legal Services regarding legal training and information needs.

***Action Plan:***

**Beginning July 2016,** we will encourage mid-level supervisors and workers to submit inquiries and requests for information on recurring legal topics relevant to the everyday activities of employees.

**Beginning July 2016,** both the general counsel and section chiefs for DHS Legal Services will meet regularly with division and deputy directors to ascertain and improve the effectiveness of representation, as well as the advice and counsel being provided by DHS Legal Services.

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***Important Results:***

- The increased understanding of the needs of the workforce regarding legal services
- The improved effectiveness of advice and counsel provided to the workforce

***OUTCOME 3: We are engaged with communities to meet the needs of Oklahomans.***

***Goal 1:*** We will build and strengthen community partnerships.

***Objective 1:*** Beginning July 2016, we will educate the legal community about the availability of DHS information, the resources of our agency, how to access public records and other topics, as needed.

***Action Plan:***

**By October 2016,** we will identify issues to be addressed within the legal community.

**By January 2017,** we will coordinate with the Oklahoma Bar Association to identify the most effective means of educating other members of the legal community.

**By June 2017,** we will develop curriculum to be presented to the legal community.

**Beginning July 2017,** we will actively pursue opportunities to educate fellow bar members on legal issues relevant to the social services provided by DHS.

**Beginning July 2017,** we will give presentations to various law schools.

**Beginning July 2017,** we will identify Continuing Legal Education opportunities.

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***Important Results:***

- The increased knowledge of the legal community increased knowledge of agency responsibilities, resources, information and availability of information
- The improved use of time and resources for Legal Services employees

***OUTCOME 3: We are engaged with communities to meet the needs of Oklahomans.***

***Goal 2:*** We will help Oklahomans who are vulnerable access community resources.

***Objective 1:*** Beginning July 2016, we will raise employee and customer awareness regarding the role of the legal system in providing social services.

***Action Plan:***

**By October 2016,** we will identify the information needs of employees and clients regarding the role of the legal system in providing social services.

**By December 2016,** we will develop and publish informational materials that will allow both employees and clients to better understand the role of DHS, the courts, and the judicial system in the provision of social services.

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***Important Results:***

- The decreased misperceptions of employees and clients regarding the role of the legal system in providing social services
- The increased knowledge of employees of the role of the legal system in their work

## ***OUTCOME 4: We have a culture of continuous improvement.***

***Goal 1:*** We will continue to improve the department's effectiveness, efficiency and accountability.

***Objective 1:*** Beginning July 2016, we will develop and adopt oversight mechanisms intended to understand outcomes and improve our work products.

### ***Action Plan:***

**By December 2016,** we will develop a uniform case management tool to track and monitor, at least on a weekly basis, any case activity. This tool will have the capability of producing regular case activity reports to leadership levels within the agency.

**Beginning January 2017,** we will identify barriers to effectively implement the Incident Review Analysis.

**Beginning January 2017,** we will develop a Peer Review Protocol by which attorneys within DHS Legal Services will seek review and critique by submitting drafts of briefs and other written materials intended for dissemination outside the agency.

**Beginning January 2017,** we will continue improving timeliness and sufficiency of responses to requests for advice and counsel. LARA will send notices to Legal Services employees inquiring about the status of the request, which will equip us to identify levels of responsiveness within the division.

**Beginning March 2017,** we will follow up with divisions to ensure continuous improvement associated with the Incident Review Analysis.

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### ***Important Results:***

- The improved responsiveness within Legal Services
- The increased knowledge and awareness regarding the status of ongoing legal actions
- The improved oversight for ongoing legal matters

## ***OUTCOME 4: We have a culture of continuous improvement.***

***Goal 2:*** We will continue to evaluate the impact our services and benefits have on Oklahomans who are vulnerable.

***Objective 1:*** Beginning July 2016, we will identify and, if necessary, revise any procedures and practices that have the potential to impact the due process rights of individuals seeking benefits from the Department of Human Services.

### ***Action Plan:***

**By December 2017,** we will identify administrative hearing notices from across the agency spectrum and review them for legal sufficiency.

**By June 2018,** we will review and evaluate the legal sufficiency of administrative hearing procedures and practices impacting the due process rights of individuals.

**Beginning June 2018,** we will begin developing proposed revision to administrative hearing notices that satisfy legal sufficiency.

**Beginning June 2018,** we will begin developing proposed revisions to administrative hearing procedures and practices that satisfy legal sufficiency.

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### ***Important Results:***

- All administrative hearing notices affecting the rights of individuals and/or entities sent by the Department of Human Services are constitutionally sound
- All administrative hearing practices and procedures impacting the due process rights of individuals are constitutionally sound
- The increased assurance that those individuals who may be denied benefits receive adequate notice of their rights





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