Statement of the Co-Neutrals,
Eileen Crummy, Kathleen Noonan and Kevin Ryan
On Approval of the Oklahoma Pinnacle Plan
July 25, 2012

On January 4, 2012, the Oklahoma Department of Human Services (OKDHS), jointly with the Governor’s Office and the Oklahoma Commission for Human Services, reached an agreement with the Plaintiffs in the federal class action litigation DG vs. Yarbrough, Case No. 08-CV-074. The settlement agreement charged Oklahoma to develop a plan to reform, strengthen and improve the Oklahoma child welfare system to better serve the State’s children and families. Over the past seven months, OKDHS, with the assistance of state leaders, advocates and other stakeholders developed the Pinnacle Plan, a five year roadmap of significant commitments, beginning with State Fiscal Year (SFY) 2013, to address the 15 performance areas identified in the parties’ settlement agreement approved by the court. The State and the Plaintiffs chose and approved the three of us to serve as “Co-Neutrals” under the agreement, vesting in us the authority to approve or reject the Plan prior to its implementation, and then monitor its implementation.

Following extensive consultation with the parties, we approve the Pinnacle Plan, which is attached in its final form and is now binding pursuant to the terms of the settlement agreement. We do so because the Pinnacle Plan articulates a bold new vision for the improvement of the Oklahoma child welfare system, including:

1. A commitment to work with families and children as partners, and provide services to help strengthen families and ensure children’s safety, permanency and well-being;
2. A newly integrated system for screening, investigating and reporting allegations of child maltreatment in out of home care;
3. The elimination of shelter care for young children and steep reductions in the use of shelter care for older youth;
4. The end of primary and secondary casework assignments, which had at times led to confusion and diluted accountability;
5. Ambitious commitments to grow more family settings for children in out of home placement, including resource homes and treatment foster homes;
6. The establishment of a new, integrated Child Welfare Division within DHS with responsibility for children’s safety, permanency and wellbeing;
7. Reasonable workloads for staff so that they can devote themselves properly to the needs of vulnerable children and families.

This is a thoughtful and ambitious plan; very hard work is yet ahead to build the system OKDHS describes. Success will require the continued leadership and support of all three branches of government in the best interests of Oklahoma’s children. It will not be easy – change of this magnitude will take time. Focus, investment, transparency and perseverance will be essential to reach the goals.
identified in this Pinnacle Plan. As Co-Neutrals, we intend to report fairly and openly over the next five years on the State’s progress in making the Pinnacle Plan a reality for the children and families of Oklahoma.

As contemplated by the parties’ original agreement, we now turn our attention to working with the parties to identify the specific performance targets and baselines that will mark Oklahoma’s progress in the implementation of the Pinnacle Plan, which we expect to finalize by no later than December 2012.