



Timeline of Events Leading to No Confidence Vote for DCYF Secretary Ross Hunter

As you will see in the timeline below, WFSE DCYF members have done everything in our power to work with Mr. Hunter to accomplish the agency's mission to "protect children and strengthen families so they flourish."

We have tried to collaborate with Mr. Hunter but have been met with ignorance about the work we do and indifference to the issues we raise, all of which have put children and staff at risk.

On June 7, 2023, at an adhoc DCYF Policy Committee meeting, [a resolution](#) to recommend to the WFSE Executive Board a vote of no confidence for DCYF Secretary Ross Hunter passed unanimously.

On June 23, 2023, the WFSE Executive Board, representing 47,000 WFSE members across Washington state, passed the resolution unanimously and without amendment.

Timeline

- May 1, 2018 members from the Kent DCYF office met with newly appointed Secretary Ross Hunter to discuss concerns regarding supervising youth out of placement and staff assaults. Calendars with supervision schedules were shared with Mr. Hunter showing that youth supervision was taking a significant amount of work interfering with duties related to ensuring child safety. Staff also shared significant safety concerns including youth using drugs, staff being bit, a staff member having their eye permanently damaged from being hit, and other assaults. Mr. Hunter committed to making this a priority, however, was not yet fully in his role.
- In August 2018 DCYF under Secretary Hunter's leadership reported the Department would be bringing all youth placed in out of state mental health facilities. Approximately 84 youth.
- Washington state only committed to adding an additional 27 facility beds and the youth were brought back many times with no placements resulting in hotel stays. This was done prior to expanding CLIP beds which are still not adequate to meet the need of youth with significant mental health needs.

- July 9, 2020 a follow up meeting is held with Mr. Hunter specifically regarding youth out of placement and staff assaults. It is explained that the issue is growing both in the number of offices impacted and the severity of assaults. It was explained the ending of out of state placements, while warranted, had exacerbated the issue.
- March 2020 first DCYF employees are exposed to COVID-19 and told they did not have quarantine. This was brought up to Secretary Hunter as no plan was in place. Mr. Hunter reported the child welfare field ops response could copy APS, this was explained as not realistic as they are different with different legal requirements to see people in person.
- November 17, 2020 Secretary Hunter sent out an email update committing to a COVID-19 workgroup including partnering with WFSE.
- February 1, 2021 DCYF Statewide UMCC held reporting continue lack of PPE, lack of FIT testing, safety youth supervision, and concerns/challenges of Face to Face visits. Implementation of SSS4 series that had been bargained 18 months prior. Management committed to WFSE input into SSS4 series, facilities/day programs for youth out of placement, and PPE guidance and more staff access to PPE. Management also committed to monthly-bimonthly adhoc meetings for safety including COVID safety. Requested clear and transparent communication with the field.
- Next meeting was scheduled for 4/13/2021 and finally held 5/19/2021, on the agenda was staff mental health, safety, building occupancy which was consistently above DOH recommendations in many offices, and FIT testing. Requested clear and transparent communication with the field.
- June 11, 2021 UMCC held regarding staff safety, youth out of placement, PPE, and SSS4 positions still not being created.
- July 2021 at a statewide all staff meeting staff asked why the agency supported HB 1194 and 1227 without more FTE's being allocated specifically for the legislation and without the necessary resources to implement legislation. It was stated by management it was politically necessary to support this legislation.
- July 2021 Mr. Hunter testified before the Oversight Board regarding youth out of placement reporting that more placements are needed for youth ages 16-17 and that expanding the definition of relative placements would assist in additional placement options. Mr. Hunter did report the number of CLIP beds is insufficient but showed an extreme lack of understanding in child welfare law and policy. Suitable adult placements are allowed in dependency cases and has no impact on hard to place youth. Ross Hunter agreed to return in September.
- August 2021 Demand to Bargain held in relation to policy updates to address HB 1194 which increased workload considerably, at this meeting it was explained that this legislation not only increased workload for visit supervision but time in court.

- September 2021 Ross Hunter did not attend the DCYF Oversight Board hearing.
- October 2021 Demand to Bargain held over clinical supervision policy, brought up during this DTB was excessive workload, turnover, and other duties as assigned including youth supervision. Also addressed was social worker being a protected title and clinical supervision in reference to social work.
- October 2021 WFSE provided testimony at DCYF Oversight Board hearing reporting on vacancies, workload vs. caseload, staff safety, staff supports, need for community services and contracted service providers.
- No UMCC's were held but requested in January 2022 and delayed by management until May 2, 2022. The agenda included workload added from 1194 and 1227 increasing turnover including court issues, FTE's being withheld from the field, and continued staff safety issues.
- Management also cancelled monthly policy check-ins meant to decrease the number of Demand to Bargains following the January 2022 meeting.
- February 2022 Demand to Bargain held regarding excessive hours for OT exempt employees, OT exempt employees were (and continue to be) reassigned cases for closure, assigned cases and carrying full caseloads in addition to regular duties.
- February 2022 Vancouver office met with Ross Hunter regarding youth out of placement and staff assaults particularly impact to permanency specialist staff who carry cases for children who are legally free.
- February 2022 meeting held with management to review potential changes due to Supreme Court Rulings Reason to Know. WFSE explained that the 30 requested FTE's was not sufficient to meet the workload created by the series of rulings and its impact in court cases. Also asked about was the 120 FTE's funded in 2021 which were still not distributed and positions remaining frozen. Concerns were raised about the lack of guidance provided to the field despite the rulings occurring two years ago.
- April 2022 Demand to Bargain held over Motivational Interviewing training and implementation. WFSE team brought up concerns about scheduling training during a staffing crisis and how it would be implemented with fidelity when offices are 50% staffed.
- May 2022 UMCC The agenda included workload added from 1194 and 1227 including due to court continuances and increased contested hearings, increasing turnover, FTE's being withheld from the field, SSS4's, staff mental health, and continued staff safety issues. Requested clear and transparent communication with field staff.
- June 2022 SSS4 positions were posted for hiring following workers filing for back pay for being worked out of class.

- June 2022 statewide UMCC requested to address workload, safety, and retention.
- July 2022 management started listening sessions across regions regarding recruitment and retention. Issues that were brought up included unpaid OT, safety issues in offices, youth supervision safety, safety in the field, mental health supports for staff, communication.
- September 2022 Ross Hunter at DCYF Oversight Board regarding critical incidents (fatalities and near fatalities).
 - Recommendations from critical incident reviews DCYF to develop formal response to support staff following a critical incident similar to law enforcement. This has not been implemented.
 - Reported Department partners with culturally relevant groups and develop resources for staff. Patrick Dowd and Ross Hunter testify this has been implemented statewide-this is not accurate as there continues to be gaps in culturally relevant responses and gaps information on appropriate evidence based and/or community based supports in offices. Shows clear lack of communication with field staff.
 - Critical incident reviews recommends collaboration with court system recognizing the role an overly contentious and adversarial court system can have on child safety, Patrick Dowd and Ross Hunter report that this has been addressed and resolved. The 2022 OFCO report cited reports this is actually on hold and specifically recommends treating case workers with respect by the courts and other legal parties.
 - Increase in infants and toddlers ingesting substances.
 - Patrick Dowd and Ross Hunter speculate using lockboxes would assist in decreasing fatalities and near fatalities but wondered about liability. This is already implemented in offices with lockboxes being available in offices, through Amazon purchases, and/or office credit card use.
 - Question asked regarding concerns for 1227 and increasing fatalities and near fatalities related to neglect. Will/is higher standard leading to more child deaths due to inability to remove?
 - Danger if pendulum swings to dismantling child welfare or if standard set too high-refused to answer IF standard was set too high with 1227.
 - OFCO report cited states trainings should be prioritized within the agency, agency management response is there are already mandatory trainings that are “widely” available. This is inaccurate due to workload and some mandatory trainings only being offered twice a year or not offered enough.
 - Prioritizing staff retention and training for new staff and staff within first five years, prioritizing training for recently promoted staff, and gradual assignment of cases. While described as “critical” it was not reported to the Oversight Board.
 - Ross Hunter admitted he has someone who tracks his trainings and he does not have the ability to take all the trainings required. This in direct opposition to the view of staff having “widely” available trainings and the ability to complete trainings.

- OFCO report cites more training on the overlap between FAR and investigative pathways. Agency reported this was already implemented, specialized FAR training is no longer implemented and often cases screen to FAR that are related to caregiver substance abuse.
 - Implementation of 1227, did not report it was being implemented in some court systems already. Compared Washington to Texas with similar law that reduced removals 40% and expects reduction of 10-25%.
 - Budget chairs becoming heads of agencies, legislators will need to determine what needs of agency will be funded, don't want endless budget.
 - Suggested virtual visits being used in Eastern Washington-cannot use virtual visits legally.
 - Services provided and ability to provide services for longer under FFPSA, question asked if the agency is taking advantage of this. Ross Hunter discussed eligibility Working Connections Childcare and stated FFPSA is not needed to provide additional services. Unaware of FFPSA and provision of other services such as mental health and how long cases are kept open.
 - Mr. Hunter was unable to answer the question and did not discuss anything regarding the number of FVS workers per office.
 - Hiring and turnover status-Mr. Hunter refused to answer. Did mention retention focus groups/project.
 - Question regarding training new staff and racial equity and social justice training, only discussed losing two of the three staff running program and not new staff training.
- September 15, 2022 members respond at Oversight Board through public comment letters including concerns for lack of FTE's, pay, mental health and safety for staff, and lack of resources for families. Caseloads between 20-80 when should be maximum 12.
 - At the same meeting Ross Hunter discussed turnover at DCYF agencies. He did recognize pay as an issue for child care and JR but denied it for child welfare staff. CW staff "it is not about compensation, it is about the nature of the work"
 - JR discussed higher wages, promotional opportunities, wellness and trauma supports, and degree support.
 - Child welfare "in the beginning of the pandemic we actually saw less child abuse" inaccurate, it was underreported and there was a later increase in extreme cases.
 - Stated peer support is "incredibly well received by staff" showing disconnect with field, most staff want professional mental health services, peer support is a band aid.
 - Mr. Hunter reported that "I am tempted to provide lockboxes" in regards to toddler and infant ingestion of fentanyl and is it a mixed message. Also, reported that he was consulting on it and liability.
 - This is occurring in offices across the state and Mr. Hunters lack of awareness of prevention impacts the way child welfare is viewed and contributes to the idea that children are removed without prevention attempts.

- Question What are you doing to support your staff and have them feel appreciated? Blamed pandemic for inability to visit offices, deflected, and stated “not the world’s most touchiest feeliest human being, I would be better if I was Moorish”
 - Mr. Hunter reported they are using proactive hiring using expectations of turnover to hire
 - This is not occurring, still waiting for vacancies until positions are posted.
 - Retention Mr. Hunter reported that supervisors are receiving straight time
 - This ended and they will not return to OFM for MOU despite continued high caseloads and supervisors working additional hours to close cases.
 - Mr. Hunter discussed co-design sessions for Family Practice Model and that 300 field staff participated.
 - Most staff who participated did not know it was the Family Practice Model and majority of staff present day do not know about the Family Practice Model.
- September 2022 assignment pay denied for child welfare field operations in initial tentative agreement. Email campaign started from personal emails to state management and via statewide emails by WFSE members.
 - Ross Hunter sends email to all staff September 28, 2022 insinuating the reason assignment pay was denied and due to WFSE and stating that staff should direct their concerns to WFSE. Mr. Hunter also committed to providing answers and more clarification regarding assignment pay at this time he has yet to do so.
 - September 30, 2022, assignment pay granted to child welfare field operations CPS, CFWS, and FVS only SSS3’s-5’s. SSS1’s, 2’s, and permanency specialists were denied for unknown reasons.
 - October 10, 2022 additional comment on recruitment and retention sent to Oversight Board
 - October 2022 statewide UMCC held and management committed to a meeting before the end of 2022 and to follow up with OFM regarding assignment pay expansion. Agenda items included workload issues surrounding court primarily the impact of 1227 and 1194 and that this has increased turnover, OT being denied and/or discouraged inappropriately, staff safety in the field and youth supervision, staff mental health, SSS1’s being hired due to qualified SSS2 applicants not applying. Management claimed to not be aware of court issues, OT being denied inappropriately, or staff safety issues. Specifically asked for administrative time for fatality and near fatality cases.
 - November 2022 DCYF Oversight Board recommends increase communication with field staff including a feedback loop so that staff can provide feedback on needs including to policy and law changes.

- November 14, 2022 a violent attack of permanency specialist supervisor while supervising a youth out of placement. Management had recently lowered the number of security for staff supervising the youth from two security guards to one.
- Management schedules the next UMCC for 1/13/2023 missing the commitment to hold a UMCC prior to the end of 2022. This meeting was then cancelled due to Ross Hunter being on annual leave.
- 1/12/2023 Email campaign started due to failure of management to schedule UMCC prior to the end of 2022 and cancelling, last minute, the UMCC scheduled for 1/13/2023
- January 2023 DCYF management dissolved the statewide field advisory board replacing it with regional field advisory boards in which all information is filtered through Regional Administrators.
- January 20, 2023 DCYF labor relations Jeanette Dixon sends email to some DCYF WFSE members in response to the UMCC email campaign. In her email numerous false statements are made including that WFSE attempted to negotiate during statewide UMCC's, that the management team was aware they would be unable to schedule a second UMCC prior to the end of 2022 due to holidays and time off, reported that the agency cannot bargain MOU's. An email response was sent by the DCYF policy chair Jeanette Obelcz in response. To date no email has been sent from management or labor relations to clarify the original email.
- February 2023 UMCC management hosted two presentations and over half of the management team did not attend including Ross Hunter. This left no time for remaining WFSE agenda items. Management agreed to follow up over email. WFSE was able to ask about contact with OFM and management reported that OFM is not doing anymore MOU's including renewing straight time for OT exempt employees or expanding assignment pay. They would not report who they spoke with, how long they are not negotiating MOU's, or if they were aware other agencies are currently negotiating MOU's.
- February 28, 2023 email sent to management team with remaining agenda items. The topics were COVID safety, physical and psychological safety, staff well-being and retention, and increasing effective communication with field staff.
- Response received March 14, 2023 and no clear answers were provided by management. The response included vague commitments to challenging working environments.
- On March 30, 2023 the UMCC team responded and requested another UMCC to finish the agenda items from October. Communication was again highlighted, no response was received.
- Management sent a calendar invite for July 21, 2023 for the next UMCC date when WFSE requested a date prior to July 1 due to numerous changes going into effect July 1 and the completion of the workload study and classification reviews being completed. A statewide email

campaign was started on 5/25/2023 requesting an earlier date was initiated with over 500 emails sent.

- June 2, 2023 Demand to Bargain held over Indian Child Welfare policy updates. At this meeting management reported they have never heard concerns over shelter care hearings becoming more contentious, issues with continuances of shelter care hearings, judges talking down to workers, or issues around increased workload for initial and 30 day shelter care hearings and long-term shelter care. WFSE members asked how field staff were chosen for workgroups and this could not be answered.
- June 9, 2023 an informal Demand to Bargain is held over video recording being used in training for simulations and role playing interviews. Management could not answer any questions regarding what positions from the field were part of the workgroups to revamp trainings or how field staff were selected to participate in workgroups. The meeting started 20 minutes late as management did not want to include members in an informal DTB.