



# In the Background

A PRELUDE

Ashley Oberholtzer | Audio Documentary | 06/10/2023

## Introduction

See something, say something, right? I wish it was that simple. I would like nothing more than for leaders in our government to quietly fix this. The last thing I want to do is advertise a vulnerability in children's services. But we're past that point. This vulnerability is known, it's been exploited, and no one is doing anything about it. So I appeal to you, the public.

Our caregiver shortage is so severe, children's services are cutting background check corners. Most people think caregivers have to pass a background check before they can provide foster care, behavioral healthcare in group homes, or child care for low-income families. That used to be true. It evoked a sense of safety and security.

I'm about to tell you how those background checks work, the type and volume of criminal history attached to caregivers. Under the right circumstances, no history is disqualifying. Sometimes, no history is collected.

Comment by Bryant Williams

*You might want to warn them that this content is disturbing.*

Introduction by Bryant Williams

*Thank you for listening to In the Background, an audio documentary by Ashley Oberholtzer, a former Department of Children, Youth, and Families background check specialist and current children's rights advocate. A script of this episode is available for hearing impaired and visual learners on [www.inthebackground.org](http://www.inthebackground.org). There, you can also delve further in the background yourself. Access files and interact with maps and pivot charts while you listen or as you read.*

## Part One – The Pandemic

What were you doing when the COVID-19 virus sparked a global pandemic? I was at work, sifting through background check laws. I thought we may have broken a couple. The office of financial management, or OFM, conducts an audit every two years, to ensure departments are meeting regulatory requirements for federal funds. OFM coordinates with the State Auditor's office, who posts the Single Audit Report on their website. The 2018-2019 Single Audit report says:

“On October 1, 2018, the Family First Prevention Service Act (FFPSA) became effective. The purpose of the FFPSA is to reduce incentives for states to place children in congregate care and increase the stringency of background check requirements at group homes. Under the FFPSA, states no longer could claim reimbursement for the cost of placing a child in a licensed group home facility unless that home's licensing file contained proof that every individual working or volunteering in the facility successfully passed a national fingerprint-based background check.

“During the audit period, the Department was operating under a provisional hire policy. The policy allowed a group care applicant who had lived three consecutive years in Washington before submitting their background check application, cleared a state background check and submitted fingerprints for a national check, to work and be paid for up to 120 days while the national check was pending.” (p. 275, SAO)

The auditor almost got that right. I think his name was Jason? I remember overhearing him say to Jin, “Just want to makes sure I fully grok this.” Though I didn’t hear what he was trying to grok. I just thought, “Robert Heinlein fan... nice.” Well, he almost grok’d it. We didn’t fingerprint applicants and then let them work. We let them work and then told them to fingerprint.

When an applicant hasn’t fingerprinted yet, their background check has a status of “pending fingerprints” (p. 26, DSHS). Maybe he saw that and thought it meant pending fingerprint results. Honest mistake. Yet, an important detail. We didn’t have their fingerprints yet.

Chris Parvin, the Background Check Program Administrator, observed in April 2019, “Now that we can see what 120 days looks like we see some applicants haven’t printed within the required timeframe and Licensing will need to see if they’re still working. This is another downside to provisional hire – the tracking of compliance” (p. 216, DCYF).

The audit “found the Department paid \$4,443,104 to providers who had not passed background checks as required by the FFPSA before providing services to clients” (p. 275, SAO). They recommend “the Department consult with the grantor to discuss whether the questioned costs identified in the audit should be repaid” (p. 276, SAO).

The Grantor is at the federal level, the Administration for Children and Families, or ACF. Go to the Office of Financial Management Public Repository at [abr.ofm.wa.gov](http://abr.ofm.wa.gov), select a budget session, and then you can search and select any state level agency or program for which you’d like to see budgetary records. Type D-e-p-t and then you’ll see the Department of Children, Youth, & Families pop up. That’s where I found the supplemental budget and the Decision Package for Provisional Hires, showing DCYF requested 4,443,000 dollars at the program maintenance level, to reimburse ACF. It reads:

“After conducting a risk assessment regarding not allowing group care facility providers to use provisional hires, DCYF concluded that such an immediate change in staffing practice, especially in consideration with the new background check process, would have a significant negative impact on the providers’ staffing capacity, which narrows the state placement pool and may reduce service offerings. These impacts include:

- Increased number of transitions a child may experience.
- Reduced number of beds available for children in outofhome placement and in particular those children and youth with the highest needs, including those children and youth eligible for Behavior Rehabilitation Services and Emergency Placement Services.
- Increased number of hotel stays.
- Increased costs associated with placement” (p. 2, DCYF).

It feels strange to read the words, “such and immediate change in staffing practice” (p. 2, DCYF). Fingerprinting group care new hires before hiring them, was not a new idea. Chris implemented that process as far back as 2016, until stakeholders pushed back. Between the time I was hired in 2016, until the time I quit in 2020, we had many conversations in which I and other staff advocated for complete background checks prior to employment. Yet, this called it an immediate change.

DCYF violated federal policy when they authorized the hire of new group home providers and provided federal funding to them without first completing their background checks. It turns out, we were right. But Chris never announced to staff we failed the audit. I only knew because I overheard him tell Meryl. The audit occurred in 2019, covering the period of 2018 and 2019. In January 2020, Nicole Rose, the Assistant Secretary of Early Learning published a memo for child care. It says:

“The department and other states have a waiver with the federal Administration for Children and Families for the inter-state criminal history and the interstate sex offender registry CCDF background check requirements through October 1, 2020. This waiver also includes the requirement to complete the background check prior to first date of employment. DCYF is waiting to hear if additional relief will be available for the inter-state or other components. Inter-state background checks are required because not all states report their criminal or sex offender history to the FBI and there is no centralized child abuse and neglect registry” (p. 1, DCYF).

My thoughts turn to Charles Meach, my old supervisor. He pled with the department, as far back as 2017, to conduct interstate checks for all national background checks. He did his research, identified this data gap, and reported it. Everyone from the state auditor’s office to his boss’ boss told him not to worry about it. Now, in January 2020, three years had passed, the pandemic wasn’t yet a thing... and Nicole was publishing this memo.

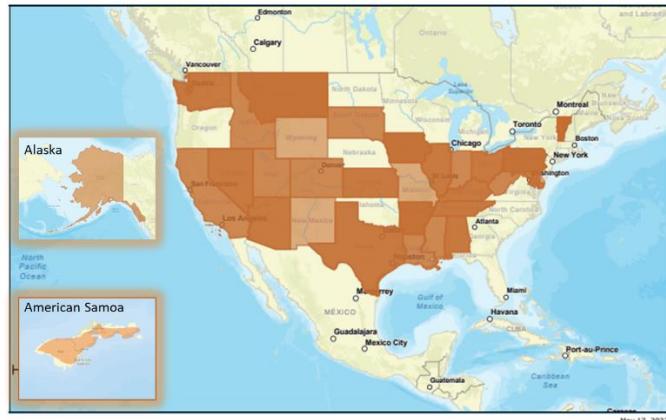
On 29 February, 2020, ACF gave DCYF permission to continue provisional hires for group homes and child care, under the Stafford Act, given that we were in a state of emergency. They also gave us permission to delay fingerprints for everyone else, like: foster parents, adoptions, relative placements, emergency placements, and suitable others. Governor Inslee mirrored ACF’s waiver at the state level, effective 26 March, 2020.

We also suspended the fingerprint requirement for parents requesting a trial return home. We didn’t need federal approval for that though. Parent background checks are only required by state law. An Administration for Children and Families Summary of Waiver Approvals says:

“48 states and territories requested and were approved for waivers for fingerprint, National Sex Offender Registry, interstate checks, existing staff backlog, and provisional hire requirements of criminal background checks” (p. 1, ACF).



## Background Check Waivers by State and Territory



Under this authorization, we told applicants, in order to become a foster parent, group home provider, or child care provider, they just needed to pass an in-state background check and agree to fingerprint for their national background check later down the road, whenever they felt comfortable. We had permission to put them to work and use them as placement resources before they fingerprinted. Meaning, before we had access to their national criminal records. The summary of waiver approvals also says:

“9 tribes requested and were approved for waivers for fingerprint, provisional hire, child abuse and neglect registry, and National Sex Offender Registry requirements of criminal background checks” (p. 15, ACF).



## Background Check Waivers by Tribe



Washington state had four out of six waivers listed for states and territories in this summary, yet... no Washington tribe asked for nor received any waiver. To put this in perspective, there are 50 states and 5 major territories. There are 574 federally recognized tribes. Out of 55 states and territories, 48 asked for background check waivers. Out of

574 federally recognized tribes, 9 asked for background check waivers. Why did most tribes handle this so differently? The ACF summary says “fingerprint locations are closed in many states and therefore unable to process requests” (p. 1, ACF). Our state proclamation, 20-31 says that too. It says:

“WHEREAS, as a part of child care licensing child care workers must submit to a background check including out of state checks requiring the submission of fingerprints and the private businesses that provide such services are currently closed and law enforcement agencies are unavailable to provide fingerprint services due to the COVID-19 pandemic response” (p. 1-2, Inslee, J.).

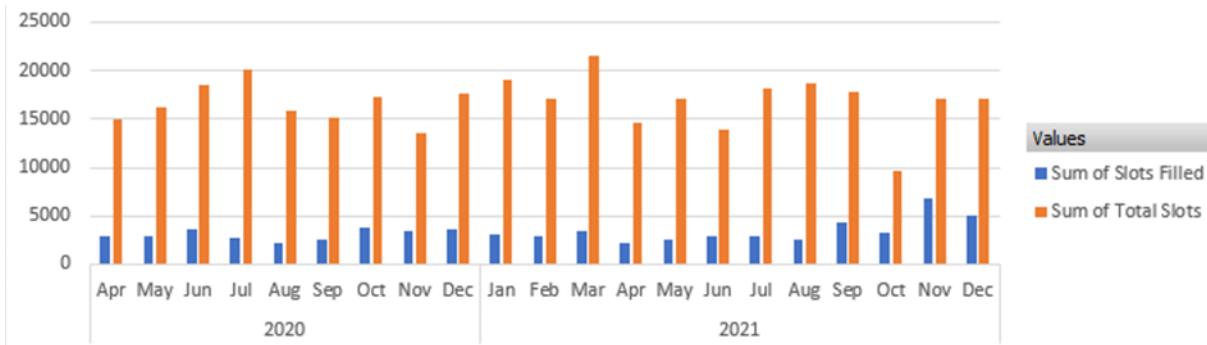
Is that right though? The department of social and health services sent lists to the background check unit, every week, of available vendors. When I checked the Washington State Patrol website, it said “In light of the escalation of COVID-19, the Washington State Patrol Criminal Records Division front counter/lobby will remain closed to the public but will be providing fingerprinting services by appointment only” (2020, WSP).

If we engaged in semantics, we could say fingerprint services were unavailable... at some locations - while available at others. If fingerprint services were so unavailable, we required fingerprint and provisional hire waivers we should expect fingerprint appointments that were available, were fully booked or overbooked most of the time, throughout the waiver period. The waiver period being 26 March 2020 until 01 July 2022. Though, I think the waiver specifically for child care ended October first, 2021.

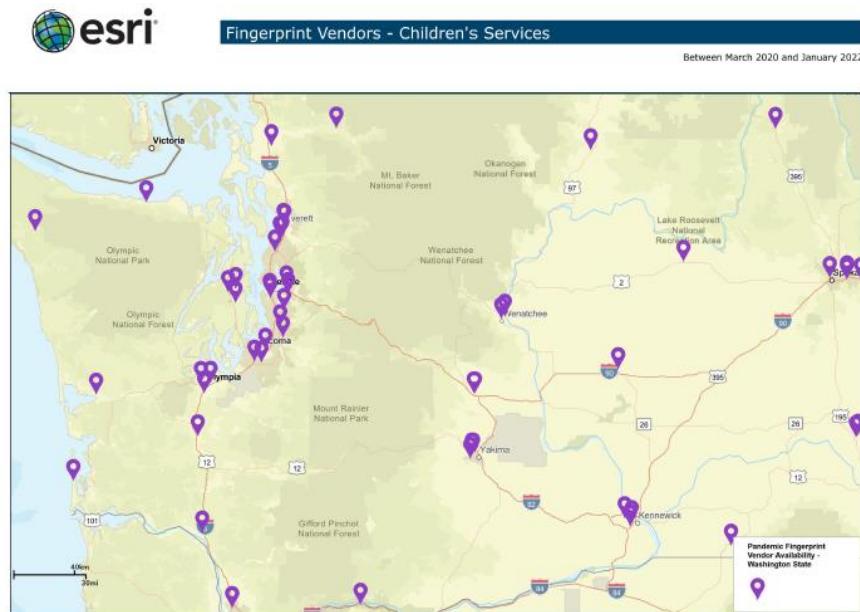
To measure this, I submitted a public disclosure request to the department of social and health services. I asked for those lists they emailed to background check staff. Theresa provided them in pdf format. This yielded fingerprint service availability data from 16 March 2020 until 4 January 2022.

25,064 rows of data describe how many appointments were available when and where on a given day. When looking at all fingerprint vendor sites, including those listed as closed, sites reached full capacity 48 percent of the time. That includes weekends and holidays and sites with shuttered doors. When looking only at open sites, vendors reached capacity 6 percent of the time. I'll say that again. Available fingerprint appointments were only fully booked or overbooked 6 percent of the time.

To compare total fingerprint appointment slots with reservations, I analyzed only those appointments most recently reported available and reserved on a given calendar day at each location. I only had around two weeks of data in March 2020 and one in January 2022. To avoid skewing the results, I trimmed those incomplete data sets before converting this into a pivot chart. Overwhelmingly, longitudinal data indicates vendor availability outpaced reservations.



There is always the geographical element to consider. To assess that, I uploaded these data into ArcGIS, creating a map of Pandemic Fingerprint Vendor Availability. 61 sites were scattered across the state. To put that in perspective, there were three times as many fingerprint vendors in Washington as there were train stations. Excluding for national parks and the cascade mountains, the furthest a resident would need to travel to reach a vendor would be around 50 miles. That's not precise. I just used an ArcGIS measuring tool to get a rough estimate.



The Administration for Children and Families' summary of waiver approvals refers only to availability but proclamation 20-31 provides a few other reasons for delaying fingerprints. It says, "it is anticipated that some child care providers may avoid or decide to not provide subsidized child care or may withdraw their services," if they can't meet regulatory requirements.

If they can't fulfill the fingerprint requirement, they can't hire and if they can't hire they can't maintain their staffing ratios. Remember why DCYF delayed fingerprints back in 2018 and 2019 for group care? They were worried about staffing shortages and

the impact that has on service offerings. Here, they're worried about the same thing for low-income child care.

Washington's state proclamation also says "individuals who submit fingerprints in order to be approved to have unsupervised access to children would be at risk of being exposed to COVID-19 resulting from face to face contact in submitting their fingerprints" (p 2, Inslee, J.). Chris, the program administrator, is on record, saying, "the fingerprint sites have many COVID safeguards in place that I can outline, but it is more safe then going to a grocery store and on par with a medical visit" (p. 129, DCYF).

The last justification I see for these waivers in our state proclamation is that "the entities that receive and process fingerprints for fingerprint-based background checks have already or are anticipated to limit or suspend these operations in order to limit exposure to COVID-19" (p. 2, Inslee, J.). I think this refers to my colleagues and I. We received and processed fingerprints for fingerprint-based background checks.

But our transition to teleworking was seamless. We'd already requested telecommuting capability so when it was expedited for the pandemic, we were more than happy to pick up and shove off. We never planned on limiting or suspending operations though and we never did. Some staff volunteered to rotate in for office mail and that was about it.

So, if fingerprint services were available, site safety was on par with a medical visit, and I was sitting at home, staring at my computer, waiting for background check requests to drop into the que, why did we continue to renew our waiver, suspending the fingerprint requirement for two and a half years?

## Part Two – Equity

Qualitative data in email correspondence, and agency records indicate DCYF cut background check corners in foster care, group homes, and child care because they didn't have enough *qualified* caregivers and they didn't have enough suitability assessment specialists to handle the volume of criminal history they needed to review in order to approve more caregivers.

TVW records public meetings and posts audio on their website. Those conversations show a clear link between changes in background check procedures and caregiver shortages. Lorie Lipold briefly touched on this during a June 2020 Children and Youth Behavioral Work Group.

2:17:00 – Children and Youth Behavioral Work Group, 5 June, 2020.

*"a recent meeting, supervision issues, incentivizing those background checks, um, there are some criminal hist – there are some with criminal history – certain criminal history that may be precluded from even entering into a program, and then looking more at the sunrise reviews."*

And again during a September 2020 Children and Youth Behavioral Work Group meeting.

1:01:00 – Children and Youth Behavioral Health Work Group, 18 September, 2020.  
*And that is another part of the recommendations from the Workforce Board to address. Uh, the final one for our priority is around – or likely priorities – uh right now is around background checks and criminal history. Uh – again, thinking about the links that we have with the Workforce Board, and wanting to make sure that we are coordinating – that this one is maybe a bit less fleshed out at this point. They have a meeting coming up with their stakeholder groups soon and we as a subcommittee need to keep talking about it and working on this one. Uh, but the goal again is to make sure that as many barriers are removed for people to enter in to the behavioral health workforce. We are – so, those are the priority areas that we're focusing in on.*

How much and what kind of criminal history passes a DCYF background check? I already had an idea but I wanted it in writing so I submitted a request for information, or RFI to the DCYF public disclosure office, asking how many background checks during the pandemic revealed convictions requiring suitability assessment. Then I asked how many passed or did not pass suitability assessment. DCYF replied...

[Suspenseful music]

*“DCYF does not have a report for this information.”*

This kind of information could help the department compare policy intent with policy implementation. Expanded data collection in this vein could measure equity in background check outputs, both for caregivers and the children placed with them. This would align program theory and show legislators how their decisions are applied at the agency level. I proposed this idea twice to the current and former DCYF Oversight Board Chairs, once as component of transparency analysis and once in the form of a one-page policy proposal. I'm sure they'll get back to me...

Very early during the pandemic, around March 2020, I remember receiving an email about the opportunity this crisis presented for DCYF to implement change. Disqualification criteria became more flexible under the new *Secretary's List*. We stopped directing applicants to share their criminal history with their case workers and licensors, unless the applicant was part of a trial return home. All other case workers and licensors only needed to know whether the applicant passed.

The Adoption and Safe Families Act regulates the distribution of Title IV-E social security funds to state children's services. The act requires caregivers complete a fingerprint-based background check before they can be approved to receive Title IV-E funds. It also includes a short list of disqualification criteria. States are encouraged to flesh out this list, called the ASFA list, according to their interpretations of risk.

Compare crimes on our state *Secretary List*'s with the federal ASFA list. You'll see DCYF immediately disqualifies applicants convicted of crimes listed in the ASFA. They also list their own criteria. Their criteria is eligible for what used to be called an administrative review and is now called a suitability assessment. We're not talking about petty crimes like theft. That kind of history automatically passes. It doesn't require

assessment. Potential foster parents, group home providers, and child care providers with the following convictions are eligible for suitability assessment and approval:

Abandonment of a dependent person; animal cruelty; communicating with a minor for immoral purposes, criminal mistreatment, criminal trespass against children, endangerment with a controlled substance; failure to register as kidnaping or sex offender; finding of abuse, neglect, exploitation, or abandonment; hate crimes; incest; luring; permitting commercial sexual abuse of a minor; promoting suicide, reckless endangerment; sexual misconduct with a minor; sexually violating human remains; stalking; unlawful imprisonment.

There are more crimes on this list but these stand out to me the most when I think about eliminating abuse, neglect, racism, and rape culture in children's services. Background checks that pass suitability assessment can take a couple of months, or more, if the person applying delays participating in the assessment process, quite a bit more time consuming than the usual, two-day turn-around time for in-state checks and two-week turn-around for national checks with no history.

While looking for the *Secretary's List*, I found a DCYF press release from March 4th, 2020. It explained this newly revised list reflects their interpretation of what is both safe and equitable. It talks about giving adults a second chance. DCYF reports developing this list in collaboration with stakeholders from eleven different departments, agencies, associations, councils, committees, and advocacy groups. I don't see youth represented in this collaboration though. It appears the only parties involved are those who were trying to resolve the staffing crisis or advance caregiver's rights. Representative Noel Frame seemed to confirm this during that June 2020 Children and Youth Behavioral Work Group.

2:52:14 – Children and Youth Behavioral Work Group, 5 June, 2020.

*"Um, second, in terms of the youth and what we're looking for, um – it's a pretty basic uh requirement um that they've got some sort of experience in the behavioral health system, Um. I think um, up until now, you know, we're kinda relying on um groups that are often engaged in the legislative process that work with young people as a connector. Um, and I think just the one thing, and I really want to say this out loud and HCA, I probably haven't said this clearly enough but in all the work um, that I have done in this legislative process, and in other processes as well, in my non-legislative capacity, doing community engagement and facilitation, um, it's really important that when we do have young people at the table, that we're making some extra efforts to prepare them to participate, because, I mean, I-I'm intimidated by this group and I'm a legislator and I'm forty years old. Haha. So I can only imagine a young person, uh, walking into this, uh, and just could be completely silenced by fear and anxiety of participating. So I want to make sure that we are – as we are bringing those young people on that we are doing the important work of prepping them."*

Looking at anything through an equity lens means placing the needs of the most vulnerable first. Washington State's Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) published their strategic priorities for the years 2021 through 2026. That document talks about the roots of racial disparities and disproportionalities in children's

services. DCYF acknowledges the historical trauma of assimilation policies but does not seem to acknowledge the historical trauma of physical and sexual abuse and neglect which occurred under those same policies.

DCYF talks about how incarceration disproportionately impacts the BIPOC community and how that may impact BIPOC caregiver qualification. From that angle weakening background check procedures could decrease assimilation... it could empower more white caregivers to abuse BIPOC children and children who identify or present as LGBTQ.

This is not a paradox. Balance is possible so long as DCYF transparently measures background check equity. For DCYF to truly understand their background check outputs, they would need to do some kind of statistical analysis on those outputs. What kind of criminal history do caregivers have and what are both their demographics and the demographics of children impacted by their history? When I asked DCYF for this information, they had no record they could provide me of any output tracking system, equity-based or otherwise. When I looked into qualitative data round this, I found DCYF's changes in background check procedures are primarily motivated by caregiver shortages.

When we talk about dismantling structural racism and reducing systemic harm, we often talk about breaking down background check barriers. In most sectors, that approach is entirely appropriate. Disclosing criminal history can create significant barriers for adults *and* youth exiting the justice system, limiting options for housing and employment, making it hard for them to reestablish themselves.

Background checks for adults providing children and youth services are quite different. When viewed through an equity lens, the vulnerable person in this scenario is the child or youth in need of safe placement, or safe child care, or safe behavioral healthcare. In this context, background checks are a preventative tool used to reduce systemic harm and enhance child safety. Lorie came close to addressing this in that September 2020 Children and Youth Behavioral Health Work Group.

2:49:50 – Children and Youth Behavioral Health Work Group, 18 September, 2020.

*"Um, representative, very quickly, um, on the subject of equity, one of the concerns that I've heard over time is that in the – the community and public, the behavioral health agencies, um, that there tends to be a lot more turn over of the staff and with Medicaid – children on Medicaid often being referred to clinics as opposed to let's say to a private therapist. Um, are they – do we have any way to identify if the children and youth going to a behavioral health agency are more likely to see somebody who has less experience, who is more likely to turnover, um, to not have continuity of care and all of that. And maybe as we talk further about this, that might be something that we could look at because that does seem to be a bit of an equity issue."*

She asks a valid question here. Also, are those children and youth more likely to interact with a caregiver who's undergone DCYF's version of a background check? Strategic priorities are available in the Office of Financial Management's public repository. DCYF's plan highlights advancing racial equity and increasing quality services. *Advancing racial equity*, yet hate crimes are eligible for suitability assessment

and approval... When sex crimes against children are only disqualifying if they rise to the level of a felony... can you really say you're providing quality children's services?

There is this thing called intersectionality. In 2021, students at River Ridge Highschool, in Lacey Washington, protested racism. They told news correspondents they were protesting racism *and rape culture* in their school. They said they had problems with both. I applaud the department's stated goal to eliminate racial disparities and become an anti-racist organization. I challenge them to make an additional goal, to eliminate rape culture and become a child protection agency.

What is child safety anyway? Who gets to decide that?

You may recall *The Trials of Gabriel Fernandez*, a Netflix documentary about a young boy, in and out of foster care. He found stability with his uncle and his uncle's partner until the state ordered reunification. After reunification, Gabriel's mother and her boyfriend gradually beat him to death. Do you recall what their motive was? for locking him in a cabinet, burning, whipping, choking him, and fracturing his skull? The prosecutor called it a hate crime. Said it was murder by torture. Gabriel's mother reportedly said she and her boyfriend "were trying to beat the gay out of him" Think about that.

The only people who can truly define child safety are children and youth in care, those stakeholders with the highest interest in this subject and the least influence. Those voices are largely inaccessible on the basis they're minors and they're minors in crisis. The average person can't just approach them and ask. High stress conversations like that can cause harm. That's why agencies do their own program performance monitoring. To learn how safe children and youth feel with their caregivers, DCYF should ask.

When foster parents exit children's services, they complete an exit survey. Why not an exit interview for children and youth? The office of the superintendent of public instruction manages the administration of a healthy youth survey and that's extremely helpful. But it doesn't connect background check outputs with child and youth safety outcomes in foster care.

The University of Washington received approval and administered a youth safety survey back in 2008. That survey asked about adverse childhood experiences in care. The U dub wrote this was "the first survey of youth in Washington's foster care system ever done for the Children's Administration." This was about a decade before the Children's Administration was absorbed and rebranded under the Department of Children, Youth, and Families.

With only 706 respondents, the survey was limited in its scope. Results may have also been skewed by the telephonic method. Calling youth on foster parent phones, in their placement homes, inhibited researchers' ability to verify privacy and security on the other end of the line. With that being the case, it is not possible to confirm respondents felt safe enough to answer honestly.

Still, when asked if there was a time the year prior, in 2007, when another person at their placement made them feel physically unsafe, 14% of youth responded "yes." In almost half of those instances, the person who made them feel unsafe was another youth. In almost a third, it was a foster parent. The main reason given for feeling unsafe was that the youth felt threatened. Lucas Benewah gave voice to her son during a November 2022 DCYF Oversight Board meeting.

3:18:47 – DCYF Oversight Board, 17 November, 2022.

*“its been 15 years and 10 days since my children were removed from my care. Um. My son will be 18 on February 18<sup>th</sup> 2024. And on that date he will have waited 5,947 days to go home. He has recently, in writing, requested that I get him an attorney. He has recently, in writing, told me he would rather die than be at his placement. He has recently, in writing, told me that he has been abused, that his sister and his brother have also been abused. Um... let me see here, he has acted out violently at school. He has acted out violently at home. He has harmed himself. He has been hospitalized repeatedly for attempting suicide. He is currently heavily medicated. Um, he made contact with me and his adoptive family removed his cellphone. She called me and informed me that he doesn’t have a right to talk to me, which, I mean, he’s 16 years old. He had a cell phone. Um. He’s asked me to share with whoever will listen, that he wants to leave. Um, I took screen shots of everything I’m saying so I have documentation of all of this.”*

DCYF removes children from their homes in order to protect them from abuse and neglect. So, it's reasonable to argue program success requires a lack of abuse and neglect within the foster care system. Steven Griley, with DCYF, talked about maltreatment in care during a Human Services and Early Learning Committee meeting.

4:57 Human Services and Early Learning Committee

*“But you can see here some of the numbers in terms of how um, how this shakes out. So with 124,000 - roughly – intake calls annually, about 64,000 are screened out. 13 to 14,000 are non-CPS intakes, and then there are 47,000 to 48,000 that are screened in for CPS investigations. Some of those go to FAR. Um, or are assigned for traditional investigation. There are about 2,000, however, that are also – that involve foster care parents. So there are of course reports of abuse and neglect that occur in out of home placements, um, that also need to be investigated. And those are investigated by the licensing division rather than by the CPS investigator. So it’s important to also keep that in mind as a distinction.”*

The DCYF Oversight Board is concerned about the level of maltreatment in care. Krista highlighted the need for better child safety performance monitoring during a November 2022 DCYF Oversight Board meeting.

0:50:22 DCYF Oversight Board, 17 November, 2022.

*“So this is an outcome measure, um. I’d definitely like the board to weigh in on this. So this is the maltreatment rate of youth while in out of home care. This was the one area of concern from last year’s report, because we saw this, kind of a trend - a little bit of an increase in that rate. We don’t have a more updated recent data point since last year’s report. We requested it and we were told it would be available mid January. So, we put inconclusive at this moment simply due to the fact that we don’t have a new data update since our last report. Um, but obviously it was a concern of the board’s last year. And so for this data outcome measure, it’s a very short page, but I was wondering if the board – we’ve added a statement about the concerns and that the oversight board urges DCYF to publicly report on the most recent data...”*

It is reasonable to expect children and youth are safe while placed in child protection services. It is also reasonable to expect state sponsored behavioral health professionals and child care providers are safe for low-income families in need. I'm going to run a couple clips from the December 2022 Children, Youth, and Families Committee meeting, so you have a snapshot of the decision-making environment in which these background check policies are happening.

7:59 - 8:46 Children, Youth, and Families Committee, 01 December 2022

*"We are going to go into a work session where we're really drilling down and focusing, um, on the early learning workforce. I don't think I have to tell anyone who's been engaged in ah, in this issue or in this committee or in the legislature or in any job frankly, the importance of child care and the difficulties that ah the early learning space is having in ah retaining and hiring and ah finding employees. And we want to make sure that we hear directly from child care in our communities about their ah their challenges, and what um some different ideas and things that are going on in the community to help ah retain and train and attract staff. So, that will be the main focus of our work session today."*

10:25 – 13:41 Children, Youth, and Families Committee, 01 December 2022

*So, my name is Mamie Barboza and I'm the executive director for Epic. Epic is a non-profit early learning provider that has been serving Yakima County, Kittitas County, and North Central Washington for over 35 years. We provide head start, early learning head start, migrant seasonal head start, as well as ECAP services to over 15 hundred children and their families each year. Currently for ECAP, I'd like to give you a picture of what we're seeing in our classrooms. We have 281 children enrolled in ECAP and we're starting to see the impact that the pandemic has had on our littlest learners. Out of these 281 children, 25 percent of them have some sort of special need identified, whether that be cognitive, developmental, or behavioral. 18 percent of these children are on an IEP-on an individualized education plan with a diagnosed need for special education services. We're seeing more three years olds, um, than we previously had. Many of them are not yet potty trained, which requires additional support staff for diapering. We're also seeing an increase in children with autism diagnoses. Um, especially an increase in children with challenging behaviors. And these are behaviors that, um, we have not seen at this level in post pandemic years. We're seeing our youngest learners diagnosed with social anxiety and general anxiety disorders, children with explosive anger and displays of aggression. Um, children are being unable to regulate their emotions or control their impulses. So, uh in a typical preschool classroom at epic, we have a class size of 20 students. An average of three children will be on an IEP five children will require specialized education or behavioral support services, and at least one of these children would be on a potty training plan. The majority of our classrooms operate for 6 hours a day, five days a week, um with very little down time for staff. So, all of this combined with an already high workload leads to high stress and high burnout of our early learning staff. Some of the challenges we're seeing with staffing, from January to mid-September of this year alone, we had 83 positions turn over. That is twice the amount of people*

*leaving our employment compared to two thousand twenty. That's an average of ten employees who leave each month and in the three-month span of July to September, the human resources department conducted 153 interviews. Of those 153 interviews, um it resulted in only fifty bodies who actually showing up to work. The onboarding process is cumbersome. Background checks and fingerprints can take weeks and sometimes over a month to clear and by that time applicants have moved on to other job offers. We've also had many applicants decline the job offer after seeing the – the final wage offer.*

16:00 Children, Youth, and Families Committee, 01 December 2022

*Hi everyone, my name is Jodie Wall and I'm the executive director of early care and education at uh, EFC 112, serving the six counties of Southwest Washington. We provide ECAP, early ECAP, early head start, preschool and child care services to approximately 12 hundred children ages birth to twelve. The pandemic significantly impacted the early care and education industry and specifically children and families in so many ways. Two years ago, we had more staff than we had children as a result of businesses shutting down and families working from home. Today we have more children that need services than we have staff to fill these needs. As you've heard already the workforce crisis is crippling and every region of our state is struggling to recruit, hire, train, and retain skilled and qualified staff to work in programs that children and families need and rely on.*

Fade out and fade back in to delineate separate clip.

*... and all of these factors impact their ability to provide for their young children. We know, from research, that the more adverse childhood experiences a child has, the more long-term risk factors such as addiction, incarceration, and health issues they're likely to experience. This is why it's so critical for us to provide high quality early care and education opportunities during these critical windows of brain development, when children are young, so they can build the resiliency and skills they need for life. Without a skilled and qualified workforce, we're not able to offer these services to all of the children who need them.*

*Children have been through a lot in the past two years and we're seeing these impacts in the classroom every day as a result. When we compare data on our children's development in 2019 versus 2020, we see that they're behind, particularly in social and emotional skills. We're seeing this play out in classrooms across the state, where children are trying hard to manage their big emotions and feelings but they're injuring themselves, others, and property in the meantime. We have our own stories of staff wearing denim jackets to work, so that they don't get injured as badly by kids, a story of a three-year-old boy who bit his mother so badly on the face that she required multiple plastic surgeries to repair it, and sadly a four-year-old who left a suicide note in her preschool classroom.*

55:00 – 58:14 Children, Youth, and Families Committee, 01 December 2022  
*“Ranking member Dent.”*

*“Thank you, madam chair. I have a question, I believe it was for Jodie Wall. And you – you – you talked there in your testimony and I didn’t – I wasn’t clear on everything you said but you talked about a four-year-old who had written and left a suicide note? Uh. Could you maybe expand on that a little bit. Or explain maybe the circumstances that would lead up to ah a four-year-old writing a suicide note?”*

*“Yeah. Thank you. Um, Representative Dent. Um, so, yes, we did have a – a four-year-old child, it was within the last year, um, write a note and leave it in the classroom for their teacher. Um, talking about suicidal ideations. This child had many adverse childhood experiences, was experiencing a lot of – of stress in the home, um, in and out of the – the child welfare system. Um. Fortunately, we were able to provide some mental health consultation, not only for the child but for the family and really wrap around. But I think that’s what’s so critical about ECAP in particular, is the comprehensive services that access to family support, the access to mental health consultation, and staff in the class room who have strong relationships with children, um, for them to share that information so that we can provide those additional supports and resources.”*

Recruiting safe caregivers has the potential to reduce adverse childhood experiences in care, decreasing behavior health needs, decreasing escalation into the juvenile justice system, and reducing fatalities in care. That is why we conduct background checks in children’s services.

Skipping several thousand fingerprints, ignoring interstate checks and the sex offender registry, approving applicants with criminal records full of red flags, might temporarily relieve our caregiver and staffing shortages. But you know, caregiver and staffing supply would also increase if providers were funded at a rate commensurate with their peers.

### Part Three – Closing the Loop

A lack of funding and staffing for children and youth services have created what’s called perverse incentive. The more background checks the department passes, the more funding and staffing they receive. With this being the case, DCYF is disincentivized to follow up on incomplete background checks. Agency policies, administrative codes, and state laws have recently developed to facilitate this and further entrench this problem.

A letter the Children’s Bureau sent to states with pandemic background check waivers, advises the department “conduct all available name-based criminal background checks for prospective foster parents, adoptive parents, legal guardians, and adults working in child care institutions, and to complete the fingerprint-based checks of the national crime information databases, *as soon as it can safely do so*” (p. 11-12 ACF).

We got the first part. Those name-based criminal background checks are called interim background checks or provisional hire background checks. What they do, is check Washington State history. Fingerprints are for checking history in other states, well, those states contributing to the National Fingerprint File. The 2018-2019 Single Audit report says provisional hires back then had resided in Washington State for at least

three consecutive years before working. I don't remember that rule but if it was a rule, it didn't seem to apply under ACF pandemic waivers during 2020, 2021 and 2022.

Let's say, for example, someone pleads guilty to raping a minor in another state. Well, in some states, judges offer deferred judgment for first time offenses, even rape, then dismiss the charge after that person completes community service. So, for this scenario, let's say they're convicted. That would be disqualifying on a background check for children's services.

Now, let's say they move to Washington during the pandemic. They don't have a record here. If they applied to be a foster parent or a child care worker or a group home provider, their in-state background check would have immediately cleared and they would have access to children until... when exactly? When would that person feel like they could safely fingerprint? I can't answer that. But I can give you a general idea of how many fingerprints are still pending for background checks initiated during the waiver period.

DCYF background check specialists process background checks for child welfare in Background Check System accounts – or BCS accounts, which the department of social and health services – or DSHS - background check central unit operates and maintains. So, to find these numbers I really had to dig deep... ok, Theresa and her colleagues dug deep. I just sent them a lot of emails – requests for information, or RFIs until, with their patient guidance, I figured out what the right combination for getting a status update on incomplete background checks from the pandemic waiver period.

The Background Check Central Unit can use its new Background Check System to conduct analytics. They found data which indicate during the waiver period, between 26 March 2020 and 01 July 2022, DCYF initiated at least 34,670 background checks for caregivers like foster parents, relatives, suitable others, and biological parents requesting a trial return home. This also includes a portion of group care applicants. It doesn't include child care staff.

DCYF specialists process background checks for early learning in a background check system called MERIT, which DCYF maintains. I asked DCYF to calculate incomplete background checks using their provisional hire tracker. Apparently, they didn't keep one. Of those 34,670 background checks we can track through BCS, 7,651 remained incomplete as of 27 April, 2023. 7,412 of those were incomplete because the applicant still hadn't fingerprinted. The oldest, initiated 29 February 2020.

Caregiver Sector	Pending from the waiver period	Pending from new process
Child Welfare	5,178 (as of 2/27/23)	Unknown
Emergency Placement	2,041 (as of 4/27/23)	Unknown
Group Care	432 (as of 4/27/23)	1,009 (as of 12/29/22)
Child Care	Unknown	0

It's important to note, this total does not reflect active caregivers. It only reflects incomplete background checks. Some of these applicants may have not passed the interim, they may have changed their minds, or perhaps the child they were applying to care for was returned home. Only DCYF can quantify how many active caregivers,

approved during the waiver period, have still not completed fingerprints. Maybe they don't even know.

I guess the downside, as Chris put it, the tracking of compliance, isn't a downside if you just don't do it. I asked the DCYF public disclosure office, "What, if anything, is DCYF doing to ensure caregivers, conditionally approved under the COVID-19 account, complete fingerprints?" I assumed they would forward an RFI like that to Chris.

They did and he responded:

"The proclamation allowing individuals to be conditionally approved while fingerprints are in progress is over and now all caregivers must complete the required background check and DCYF only documents in FamLink those that were fully completed. All caregivers require a home study completed by the Licensing Division (LD) and LD ensures the required background check was completed."

That's not how I remembered it. I remembered typing "interim complete" under caregiver's background check tab every time I sent an interim background check result to clear a placement resource. Maybe I'm remembering that wrong or maybe he's engaging in word-play. Technically, "interim complete" means an instate check was completed and its true that's all the licensing division required during the pandemic... It's also true the waiver ended. But this doesn't answer my question... at all.

So I asked Glenda to clarify and she said she didn't have any more information. She forwarded my request for clarification back to Chris, who forwarded the same language back to me.

It sounds like DCYF does not have a plan to follow up on incomplete fingerprints. But he doesn't exactly say that and I realize a volley of emails won't likely settle the matter. So I ask him for an interview. I think, if he gave himself permission, he could clarify a lot of this. Unfortunately, he declined.

While the Children's Bureau says the department needs to complete those background checks for which DCYF delayed fingerprints, there are no regulatory policies in place to ensure the department does. The funding was already distributed and fingerprints were not a requirement of funding at that time.

I wrote to Glenda and asked her to find out "What, if anything, is DCYF doing to check on the welfare of children placed with caregivers who have not yet fingerprinted?" She forwarded my RFI to Chris who responded:

"There are several recent lawsuits and bills that we know [he means now] are required to consider as a factor in regards to moving a child specifically the KW lawsuit, HB 1747 which prevent us from moving a child for a factor such lack of background or home study unless there is a clear safety threat, then we would take this in front of the court to present evidence of the safety threat and request removal. DCYF has policies requiring regular contact with children placed out-of-home: Health & Safety policy 4420. The background policy is policy 6800. These policies can be found on [the] DCYF website"

He's talking around the question again so I ask Glenda for clarification. Again, she sends my request to Chris and Chris forwards the same language back to me. This time he adds, "DCYF does not have the legal authority to check on children that are not under our care and authority. Once a case closes we cannot check on a child unless we receive an intake

that gives us the authority to do a check" (Parvin, C., 2023). When he refers here to House Bill 1747, I think he's overlapping House Bill 1747 with engrossed Second Substitute House Bill 1227, which states:

"The following must not prevent the child's placement with such relative or other suitable person:

"(A) An incomplete department or fingerprint-based background check, if such relative or other suitable person appears otherwise suitable and competent to provide care and treatment, but the background checks must be completed as soon as possible after placement."

The Washington state senate passed this in April 2021 with 48 Yeas and 1 Nay, a strong bipartisan strategy to entrench incomplete background checks in state law. How soon after placement must they fingerprint? Didn't we say this about caregivers during the pandemic aaaand that was over three years ago.

Maybe Chris had HB 1747 on the brain because it's the department's get out of jail free card. I'll tell you about that in a minute. The policies Chris refers to talk about dependency. A child or youth's status as a dependent of the state is what gives DCYF the authority to run a background check on a potential caregiver.

Once adoption occurs, a case is closed – for whatever reason, dependency ends, so does the Department's authority to follow up on the background check, and child safety too, according to Chris' interpretation of the facts. If the department chose to follow up, staff could select the appropriate filters in the BCS system to generate a by-name list of incomplete background checks for each Background Check System account.

Background check staff could then cross-reference that list against caregiver authorization in FamLink – our state's version of a cps database. It would be fairly easy, though potentially time consuming. One employee could check at least 10 names per hour, or 80 names each work day. It would take around 96 days for one person to complete that task.

To do this fast and avoid a back log of new background checks, I'd recommend assigning four temporary full time employees to this for one month. These could be forms and records analysts. They wouldn't need criminal history record information training as they wouldn't be viewing any criminal records. If we expect one month to have between 20 and 23 work days, they could produce an accurate count and an accurate list in one month. Then, you could integrate fingerprint follow-ups in to your regular workload. Legislators would then have a clear picture of what's going on.

We can all make recommendations. We can also monitor for status improvements and mass archives. I did that in Washington and learned there *was* a mass archive – in the MERIT system. When I asked DCYF how many background checks for child care and early learning were still incomplete, Chris said, "the answer to this question is ZERO (0). All applicants that were originally submitted as FP that were reverted to NDOB during the proclamation were then required to complete FP and if they did not they were archived and do not have a cleared status." Also, "we do not collect hire information" (p. 1, DCYF).

Well, they certainly had a cleared interim background check status when they were hired under provisional hire waiver. So, what he's saying is, DCYF archived incomplete background checks for child care staff without first checking to see if they'd been hired. "Zero"… Is that how we do math? Can I just throw away all my bills and say I now have zero bills to pay?

It reminded me of DCYF's response to a follow up question I submitted, regarding criminal history. DCYF told me they couldn't say how many background checks they passed with crimes requiring suitability assessment. But they passed zero background checks with federally disqualifying crimes. I happened to know that's not exactly true. I can understand why the public disclosure office would report this as zero. On the surface, that seems like a given.

I just hope they didn't get that information from Chris. He knows better. Judges in family court have judicial immunity, allowing them to place children with a caregiver who is also their abuser or whose background check reveals a conviction listed in the ASFA. Judges can do that, not just with biological parents, but also with foster parents, relatives, and suitable others. When this occurs, Chris instructs a background check unit supervisor to go back and pass background checks that didn't originally pass. A supervisor told me that once and I immediately turned to Chris, who was standing right there. I asked him if that was true. He confirmed it was. When I asked him why, he said they did it "to keep the moneys." That didn't sound legal to me but here I am, following up on child safety and he mentions House Bill 1747, I looked it up. The bill says:

"Apply the list of disqualifying crimes in the adoption and safe families act, unless doing so would compromise the child's safety, or would adversely affect the state's ability to continue to obtain federal funding for child welfare related functions."

Federal funding requires a passing background check. So, this language allows DCYF to go back and pass a background check they initially did not pass, in order to retain that funding. This policy of changing a background check decision doesn't seem to impact child safety because, when the court orders it, the placement will occur regardless. So the idea is that, it's in the child's best interest for the department to facilitate that caregiver's access to social security funds, that they may better care for the child. Perhaps an oversight, this well intended bill makes the background check output opaque. Passed. Did not pass. What's the difference?

There are many misconceptions in the public square, suggesting departments like DCYF are somehow making money off children. It doesn't help that the word "equity" has two completely different definitions, definitions that clash in a very unique way in public conversations about children's services. People who don't watch the news regularly, who aren't keyed in to public administration, may have only heard that word used in regards to finance, as in a home mortgage for example. In that context, equity means a return on investment. It evokes the idea that by pursuing equity in children's services, the government is seeking a return on investment. That somehow, the more children in care, the more money the state makes.

If that were true, DCYF's Strategic Plan probably wouldn't include a goal to cut the foster care population in half. The reality is, children's services are severely underfunded and understaffed. That's why administrators rely on federal funding from

sources like the Child Care and Development Fund Block Grant Act – or CCDF and the Adoption and Safe Families Act – the ASFA, in addition to state dollars. I wonder how much staffing we could have funded with those four million dollars we lost to bad background check policy in 2018 and 2019.

Former Governor Christine Gregoire defended the state's ability to collect a child's social security funds to retroactively pay for a portion of their care. She explained how those funds are appropriately used and how inadequate they are to fulfill a child's needs via department service. She made these comments back in 2002, during a Supreme Court Hearing:

0:00 - 0:37  
Intro

8:30 – 09:17

*"We're talking about children who arrive in the state's custody, having been abandoned abused or neglected, they are subject to the jurisdiction of the juvenile court, and then those children are assessed, for an individual service plan as to what their needs are. And what's happening when that assessment takes place is their needs are being met by the department. In fact, the average payment for foster care of an SSI child is one thousand one hundred and seventy six dollars. The average amount that an SSI benefit would be is something short of five hundred. And the base foster amount is something short of five hundred."*

The state has a variety of funding sources but they don't stock pile these funds. They spread them out to underpaid child care staff, social workers who wish they had hazardous duty pay, and caregivers who can barely afford day care in child care deserts. There is no financial equity to be had in a system so wildly underfunded. According to DCYF, government sponsored caregivers have a direct impact on children experiencing adverse childhood experiences. That's the kind of equity we're talking about in children's services – social justice equity, the process by which we make equality real.

I'm suggesting, the nature of caregiver impact directly relates to caregiver quality. The purpose of a background check is to create a barrier between would-be child abusers and children. It's really that simple. Background checks are a preventative tool for reducing systemic harm in state sponsored care.

We've talked a lot about background checks for children's service providers. What about background checks for biological parent's seeking a trial return home? To safely reunite children and youth who are dependents of the state, with their biological parents, Washington State's Sirita's Law requires biological parents and other adults living in their home first complete national background checks. You may recognize this language in the new Oakley Carlson Act.

These bills do not include disqualification criteria and so background checks for parents are not disqualifying, no matter their history. DCYF runs the check, sends the result to the parent – history/no history; if history, they provide a copy, and DCYF tells them to share it with their case worker. That case worker can then use that information to make an informed recommendation to the court. That's not to say the court will listen.

Judges and street level bureaucrats alike are all very aware of caregiver shortages, I think that's really why one of DCYF's most important goals in their strategic plan is to reduce the foster care population by half. When there are too many children in care and not enough caregivers, DCYF is forced to place children and youth in placement exceptions, like hotels and offices. Those are among the most dangerous kinds of placements.

Placement exceptions coincide, not just with caregiver capacity, but also the size of the foster care population. To equalize pressure on the department, it seems DCYF is attempting to decrease demand and increase supply. I would assess the means by which they're doing this as high risk, cutting background check corners to onboard more caregivers and offboarding children from care to parents who have not completed a background check or whose history just has little impact on placement decisions. Public comment illuminated this during the November 2022 DCYF Oversight Board meeting.

3:31:00 - DCYF Oversight Board, 17 November, 2022.

*"Um. I have Krista Carlson?"*

*"Yeah. Uh, first of all, thank you, for everyone who is on this meeting and thank you for allowing, uh, for public comment. My history in foster care is as a foster parent. I have been a foster parent in other states and so I'm coming to this with a slightly nuanced perspective. What I'm seeing in Washington state and what I want to talk about very briefly are two issues. One having to do with safety, which was touched on in this meeting, and the other, the retention and recruitment of foster parents. Uh, we – if we live in an ideal world, reunification is the goal and I've been a part of reunifications, I've advocated for reunification, uh, for children in our home when it is safe, in their best interest, permanent, and fostered their well-being. What I'm seeing now in the changes in the legislation in Washington State, is that reunification is um touted at all costs. And that is what I'm experiencing within our own, ehm, children in our own placement and ah we support our local community of foster parents and that's what I'm seeing, ah, widely in our group of families. "I'm seeing kids, uh, going home, reunified, with fresh bruises on their faces from their visits. I'm seeing children where there's still an open investigation, uh, of tasering as a means of discipline, being returned home. I'm seeing those same children come back after reunification because they swallowed fentanyl two months later. Um, there's a case right now where a little girl is going to be returned home to a mom who denies her um diagnosed seizure med – refuses to give her medication. And what I'm experiencing is a return at all costs. Recently DCYF acknowledged publicly that the risk is increasing to children. And it wasn't said in a term, er, in a context of care or concern but just as a matter of fact. The natural outcome that they're willing for the children to bare."*

I know this is about finding shelter and mental health service for children in crisis, which we cannot do if we don't have enough providers. Legislators know this. They're the ones who approve these background check policies. But maybe legislators don't see what's happening in the background. I hope this message brings that to the foreground and I hope it explains to the public and public employees, why this is happening. This

conversation is essential. To the general public, a system vulnerable to child maltreatment looks a lot like a system made for maltreatment.

The governor's proclamation, authorizing the fingerprint waiver began on 26 March 2020 and ended on 01 July 2022. Two and a half years ago, Chris said "There are individuals who have not printed and we have no history for them yet so the longer we wait to fingerprint is also a concern for risk." It's been over three years since this all began, around a year now since the fingerprint waiver ended.

In 2019, Chris said "Now that we can see what 120 days looks like we see some applicants haven't printed within the required timeframe and Licensing will need to see if they're still working. This is another downside to provisional hire – the tracking of compliance."

Yet, there is no indication DCYF tracked which caregivers, approved during the pandemic did or did not fingerprint. Likewise, there is no indication DCYF plans to follow-up and find out. In fact, there is every indication they plan on burying these background checks and forgetting about them. That is surreal. In my heart, each one of those 7,412 incomplete background checks represents a child, a youth, who trusted me and my unit to protect them.

A friend of mine recently accepted a position with children's services in another state, with the same fingerprint waiver we had. She told me, during her first week on the job, this was all anyone was talking about and they were talking about the fact that no one seemed to care. When administrators fail to meaningfully engage with staff, employees are left to their own imaginations and the sticky online interwebs.

Transparency, when it comes to this issue, is not just a matter of public preference. It's a matter of public safety and homeland security. This is a volatile subject in the public square. Just like bad policy, a lack of communication around bad policy can have unintended consequences. This is especially true in child welfare, given deeply entrenched conspiracy theories surrounding government funded children's services.

When bad policy combines with low transparency, we've seen a distressed public respond in a variety of ways, ranging from Faye Yager's Children of the Underground to Quanon's January 6th insurrection. I highly recommend administrators tell the truth about what they're doing and why. I found no indication anything nefarious is going on here – naivete, denial, agency loyalty, sure. It's time to shake that off and fix this. Close these loopholes. Follow up. Fund children's services.

"The Government" is not a single corporeal being we can all be angry with. Nor is any party within that government, nor any one administration. All those COVID waivers for background checks, they had bi-partisan support and that support continues. They occurred in red and blue states. Once unaccompanied migrant children were placed with sponsors without background checks in 2017, this became a popular trend. Weak background check procedures are becoming normal practice under state laws and administrative codes.

The government is a collective of people, like you and I, with many different views and approaches to policy. When organizations like DCYF lack transparency, legislators may not know how their policies are being implemented. This podcast attempts to partially resolve that, to jumpstart alignment between expectations and outcomes in background checks.

If you want to help and you don't know how, become a child care worker, a foster parent, a group home provider. Flood the system with safe caregivers. Show legislators and child welfare agencies across the nation, the public has the capacity to care. Now it's their turn. I'll keep updating [inthebackground.org](http://inthebackground.org) and I'll keep a channel of communication open at [ashley.inthebackground@gmail.com](mailto:ashley.inthebackground@gmail.com).

I hope what I've given you here is my final report. I'd like to move on and trust meaningful action will take place without me. What happens next is up to you. I've recorded and distributed this message. You control the volume.

Special thanks to Theresa, whose full transparency restored my trust in state government, at a time when I didn't believe that was possible. Thank you, Glenda for doing the best you could with what you had. Thank you, TVW for public meeting audio and oyez for supreme court audio. Production music by Jason Shaw via audionautix, sound effects by freesoundeffects.com, and our introduction, by Bryant Williams. I encourage audience members to share this free podcast, so child and youth safety no longer remain... in the background.

End

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