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**OKLAHOMA FOSTER CARE SYSTEM FOUND IN COMPLIANCE WITH  
MOST OF A 2012 FEDERAL COURT ORDER**

After eleven years of federal court oversight the national child welfare experts responsible for evaluating the state's efforts to improve Oklahoma's child welfare system have found that the state has made sufficient "good faith efforts" to be released from a significant portion of the Settlement Agreement entered in 2012.

In issuing its report, the experts report noted: "Years of investment by the Oklahoma legislature, support from the state's governors and DHS' relentless efforts to create a safer and more effective child welfare system have created a substantially improved system for children in many areas." The report notes that it is judging only 23 of the areas in the Agreement. Under a provision approved by the court, the state will continue to report on seven areas over which oversight was extended under a "Covid Recovery Period."

The areas that have been released from scrutiny address caseworker and supervisory caseloads, the use of shelter facilities, maltreatment in care, caseworker visitation, placement stability, and some aspects of permanency.

"We congratulate the state on the progress that they have made. This happened through a commitment to the goals of the Settlement Agreement and to a process of continually measuring whether the steps they have been taking are working, and changing course, when necessary, always with the goal of better serving children and families," said Marcia Robinson Lowry, counsel for the children and Executive Director of A Better Childhood, a national advocacy group for children. "Children in foster care in Oklahoma are far better off today than they were when we filed this lawsuit. This report amounts to an important blueprint about how other states could improve their systems."

"We are so pleased we have arrived at this point. It has been a long and, for a number of years, arduous journey" said Fred Dorwart, a Tulsa attorney and co-counsel for the children. "We are immensely thankful for the leadership of Justin Brown and Deborah Shropshire. While the journey to care for our kids in foster care will never be over, the trip has proven so well worthwhile."

The report by the expert group tracks the history of the implementation of the Settlement Agreement and how the agency expanded its strategies for dealing with a range of critical issues. These issues include the rate of maltreatment of children in



foster care, once one of the highest rates in the country and now reduced to one of the lowest rates nationally. The report also covers the state's previous over-use of shelter care, which was once routine even for infants and toddlers but is now much less frequent following the closure of the two large public shelters; for the most part only older youth are placed in the few remaining small shelters. The report also details the state's initial failure to address the needs of children with emotional and physical problems. Because of that, the report discusses the creation of a new system to develop more services for children with greater emotional and physical needs that is well underway and is a part of the seven areas of Settlement Agreement that will continue under court oversight and be subject to monitoring by the expert group.

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*A Better Childhood is a national nonprofit advocacy organization that uses the courts to reform dysfunctional child welfare systems around the country. Marcia Robinson Lowry, Executive Director of A Better Childhood, has been lead co-counsel along with Frederic Dorwart of Frederic Dorwart, Lawyers PLLC in Tulsa, OK, in the D.G. v. Yarborough lawsuit since the case was filed in 2008.*