



Legislative Watch

From the Statehouse to the Capitol

Friday, May 4, 2007

ACTION OHIO

FAMILY VIOLENCE OPTION WILL BE COMING TO A COUNTY JOB & FAMILY SERVICES DEPARTMENT NEAR YOU

On March 15, 2007, Jeanne Carroll, Deputy Director of the Office of Family Stability at ODJFS, issued a letter announcing that Governor Strickland and ODJFS Director Helen Jones-Kelley were initiating a process to implement the Family Violence Option in the Ohio Works First program. The Ohio Empowerment Coalition, which spearheaded the effort for Ohio to adopt FVO for the past four years, could finally celebrate the achievement of this goal.

Several planning meetings were held with representatives of county departments and domestic violence organizations, including ACTION OHIO, ODVN, the Domestic Violence Project (Canton) and Artemis Center (Dayton). It was noted that some county departments have been working with local DV shelters to respond to the needs of DV victims by referring victims for support services and by waiving program requirements. But without formal adoption of FVO by the state, such responses will continue by spotty and unpredictable as best.

Implementation of the FVO will include:

- Training county JFS employees about DV & the FVO;
- Screening for DV and providing resource information about FVO to clients;
- Referring victims to counseling & support services in the community;
- Waiving program requirements when compliance would jeopardize the safety and lives of clients.

But the battle isn't over yet. Family Violence Option language needs to become part of Ohio law. This could happen with the introduction and passage of an FVO Bill or with the inclusion of FVO language in the State Budget Bill, now pending in the Ohio Senate. Although dollars to implement the FVO would be federal TANF dollars, not State General Revenue Funds, winning this battle is not a slam-dunk. According to a department spokesperson, during the budget process in the Ohio House, earmarks have been placed on many TANF dollars, making them a scarcer commodity for implementing FVO.

Even if ODJFS and advocates are successful in getting the FVO into the Budget Bill, it will take considerable time to train county employees and put into place policies and procedures to make the FVO a reality. Department spokespersons suggest that the most optimistic target date for implementation is January 2008.

Please stay tuned. You may be able to play an important role in helping to support the Strickland Administration's FVO initiative.