



Mandatory Reporting Task Force | Meeting 20

June 5, 2024, Meeting Recap – Data Subcommittee

Overview

The Mandatory Reporting Task Force is legislatively charged with analyzing the effectiveness of Colorado's mandatory reporting laws in keeping children safe, connecting families with the resources they need, and providing clarity to mandatory reporters. Integral to this analysis, the task force will continue to examine the relationship of these laws to systemic issues and disproportionate impacts on under-resourced communities, communities of color, and people with disabilities.

Weld County's Online Reporting System

Directive XVIII of the bill that created the task force charges it with analyzing "the benefits of an electronic reporting platform for the state". Weld County is the only county in the state with an online reporting platform. Since the last task force meeting, Bryan Kelley and Jordan Steffen had met with employees of Weld County's Department of Human Services to discuss this system. Weld County's online reporting system is available for use 24/7. It often requires follow-up due to incomplete submissions. Approximately 31% of referrals in Weld County come from this system. Frequent users include teachers, school staff, and law enforcement, while neighbors and family members prefer calling.

The subcommittee discussed the system in Weld County, with themes emerging as described below:

System Limitations and Impact: The convenience of the online system may lead to certain groups favoring it, but incomplete reports were said to often necessitate additional staff hours. The system, originating from an email setup, has been in place for a few years. There is limited data on its impact on marginalized populations.

Usage in Other Counties: Doris Tolliver inquired about other counties using similar systems. Yolanda Arredondo noted that Weld County might be unique in this regard but mentioned general hotline emails in other counties, not necessarily for public use.

Challenges in Large Counties: Michelle Dossey highlighted challenges like incomplete information, report volume, timely responses, and decision-making, especially in urgent situations.

Technology Gap and Accessibility Issues: Donna Wilson pointed out the technology gap for communities without reliable internet access, stressing the need to consider marginalized groups. Michelle emphasized the need for accommodating individuals with disabilities and

non-English speakers. Donna also raised concerns about the clarity of terminology used in reporting systems.

Addressing Implicit Bias and Disparities: Shawna McGuckin asked about data on the effectiveness of online reporting systems in addressing implicit bias and community disparities, aligning with the task force's goals.

Type of Report Submitted: Yolanda confirmed that a pick list in Trails for child abuse and neglect reports includes options for different types of reports, such as hotline calls, walk-ins, letters, and emails. Although there is not currently an option for online reports, this system could be expanded to easily create one.

Data Comparison and Disproportionality: Michelle expressed interest in comparing data from Weld County on assignment rates based on online reports versus those made through the statewide or regular hotline. Doris highlighted the need to gather comprehensive data from Weld and possibly other counties to assess potential differences in disproportionality and response times, evaluating the effectiveness of online reporting.

Enhanced Screening Guide: Michelle suggested sharing the enhanced screening guide with the task force to improve understanding of the state's regulatory requirements for information gathering and decision-making. She emphasized the guide's importance and the lack of general community understanding about it.

Bryan was uncertain if Weld County uses the enhanced screening tool after reviewing their online reporting form. Doris suggested following up with Weld County to understand how they incorporate enhanced screening questions into their intake process and proposed discussing this further with the subcommittee. Michelle stressed the importance of ensuring compliance with state regulations, particularly regarding the use of the enhanced screening tool and timely review of referrals. She emphasized prioritizing adherence to existing regulations before implementing new practices.

Electronic Reporting Platforms in Other States

Bryan then provided an overview of the electronic reporting platform scan, which contains information about online child abuse and neglect reporting in various states. About half of the states with such systems restrict online reporting to mandatory reporters only. California does not have an online system statewide, but the County of Los Angeles maintains one. The resource included hyperlinks to explore the platforms and details on emergency reporting instructions. Overall, it's a resourceful tool for understanding different state approaches to online reporting.

The subcommittee then spent about 20 minutes adding notes to an online notecatcher to add comments about specific states, important considerations for Colorado, and personal observations.

Key Questions to Consider While Reviewing State Processes

The subcommittee sought to examine the implications of online reporting on different populations with varying levels of access to technology. There was also an interest in assessing

the data available to determine if online reporting requires more follow-up time for detailed information before making screening decisions. Another important area for consideration was exploring the ease of access and potential barriers associated with online reporting.

Conversation revolved around several themes as indicated below:

Data Aspects and Challenges: Michelle Dossey emphasized the need to understand how electronic reporting systems handle false reports, verify identities, and prosecute false claims. She is curious about California's implementation, specifically why only Los Angeles County has an online system and how it compares to other counties without an online system.

Tracking and Response Times: Yolanda expressed interest in learning how states track reporting methods and correlate them with response times, particularly distinguishing between emergency and non-emergency reports. She stressed the need for effective tracking mechanisms to ensure urgent situations are promptly addressed and to understand usage patterns of online reporting systems.

Screening Rates and Detailed Information: Yolanda highlighted Texas's emphasis on providing detailed information for effective screening and questioned if screening rates differ between hotline calls and online reports. She plans to gather data from Weld County to explore screening dynamics and inform best practices for screening protocols.

Consequences of Incomplete Information: Michelle raised concerns about incomplete information from online reports leading to unnecessary investigations and emphasized the need for a balance between thoroughness and efficiency. She also questioned the reliability and security of online reporting systems, including the frequency of technical issues or data breaches, and stressed the importance of client confidentiality.

Accountability in Online Reporting: Adriana Hartley emphasized the importance of accountability in online reporting, noting that many states require a login or username, which adds identification and ensures reports are taken seriously. She appreciated the balance between ease of use and accountability, recognizing the need to prevent over-reporting while facilitating prompt and appropriate responses. Doris discussed the need to balance the ease of online reporting with accountability by requiring users to create a login. This step discourages frivolous submissions and encourages thoughtful, detailed reporting.

Concerns About Anonymity: Donna Wilson expressed uncertainty about requiring logins for online reporting while maintaining anonymity in some jurisdictions. She questioned if creating a login compromises privacy and suggested addressing these concerns carefully. Doris emphasized Bryan's point about a common caveat in online reporting platforms, which reminds users they can remain anonymous by calling in their report instead of using the online platform. She also mentioned the importance of distinguishing between anonymous and confidential reporting for clarity.

Privacy and Completion Rates: Michelle Dossey highlighted the issue of users starting but not completing reports online due to privacy concerns. She discussed the complexity of balancing accountability with the need for anonymity, especially for individuals in dangerous situations, and noted legislative efforts in Colorado to address this issue.

Technological Approaches to Reporting: Donna questioned whether any jurisdictions offer a live chat feature for immediate assistance during the online reporting process. Bryan clarified that Kansas uses a bot for this feature rather than a human staffer. Donna expressed a preference for adding a live chat option to online reporting for real-time communication with an actual person.

Yolanda emphasized the potential benefits of talk-to-text or text-based chat features for hotline services, especially for populations uncomfortable with phone calls. Safe2Tell provides a platform for school-aged children to report concerns like bullying or abuse anonymously through a text-based system, which may be more accessible for certain demographics.

Bryan stated that a national organization had made reference to Mississippi creating an app for reporting child abuse and neglect, but was not able to confirm its existence. Michelle emphasized the need for equal access to alternative reporting methods, such as text-based reporting, across all counties. She suggested managing such functionalities at the statewide hotline level due to potential resource constraints at the county level. Adriana highlighted the practical challenges for workers in handling increased workloads from additional reports, stressing the need for feasible and sustainable reporting methods within existing systems and resources. Yolanda clarified that talk-to-text features were considered for the state hotline but not for county departments due to cost and staffing concerns.

Analyzing Data for Insights: Yolanda suggested analyzing existing data on report methods captured by Trails (hotline calls, emails, faxes, letters, telephone calls, and walk-ins) to understand the potential use of online or text reporting. This analysis could serve as a starting point to gauge the possible impact and inform decisions on new reporting features. Doris agreed, noting that this analysis could provide a proxy for understanding the potential scope and impact of alternative reporting methods.

Logistical Impacts and Consistency: Bryan suggested considering the logistical impacts on statewide and county hotlines when implementing an online reporting platform. Michelle highlighted potential issues such as call diversion and consistency between counties, stressing the need for equitable solutions.

Next Steps

Bryan plans to gather further details from Weld County to assist Yolanda's data team in this analysis. The goal is to understand the potential impact and logistical requirements of implementing alternative reporting methods statewide. The Data Subcommittee wrapped up its discussion, and returned to the whole task force to conclude the meeting.