

**October 14, 2007**

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OLYMPIA \_ 35<sup>th</sup> District Democratic legislative candidate Daryl Daugs today unveiled a six-point program he believes can start solving the many problems plaguing the state foster care and child welfare system.

“The Children’s Administration is broken and must be fixed,” Daugs said. He referred to that part of the Department of Social and Health Services whose mission is to protect children.

“This agency likes to say ‘kids come first,’ “Daugs said, “But the fact is, with their focus on bureaucracy, money, politics and an obsession with legal liability, on a good day – a really good day - kids come third in Children’s Administration.”

Standing outside the DSHS headquarters, the Bremerton Democrat added: “If Children’s Administration would pay more attention to taking care of children and less worrying about the liability when it doesn’t, they and the children would be far better off.”

Daugs is the lead union organizer for foster parents, a former foster parent and for six years headed a large private agency to recruit and support foster parents. He said agency management does not value any opinions but its own. He cited the 2006 survey that showed 80-88 percent of employees had NO confidence in senior management. He said the core value of agency management is disrespect or indifference to its employees, foster parents and caregivers, biological parents it serves or its community partners... “This agency needs more than lip service about customer service,” he said.

Daugs proposed the following steps:

- Break Children’s Administration out from the DSHS bureaucracy. He called that “a small, but important first step in shining the light of accountability on the agency.”
- Require that all top-level managers in Children’s Administration undergo a “360 performance evaluation” such as is done at Boeing and other organizations. In such reviews, individuals below, above and at the same level as the administrators are asked their opinions of the job performance
- Hire more social workers and support them. This is a common fix to a longstanding problem of overburdened social workers. But Daugs said the right kind of social workers must be hired, those with real people skills. They must be reinforced every day with the idea that it is a core value of the agency to take care of its employees, kids and their caregivers.
- Children’s Administration should be required by legislation to redefine its mission to ensure that core value is enforced. The hiring of any new social workers should be contingent on the agency producing a plan to provide better daily support for its workers and caregivers. “The time for business as usual must end,” he said.
- Create a “FosterCorps” class of professional foster parents. Most foster parents are already parents and the vast majority do not want to become professionals. But for those who do, they should be given extra training extra compensation and extra accountability for taking care of the children with the most difficult needs.
- Finally the department must seriously redefine its recruitment strategies for getting communities to “own” their children who come into state care.

“The agency is working on a new razzle-dazzle targeted recruitment system, complete with a marketing campaign, logo and slogan,” Daugs said. “But they are overlooking what is by far the most important recruitment strategy - keeping the current foster parents satisfied and supported. They will then become the best recruiters. It does no good to have 1,300 new foster parent every year when 1,300 leave, many for reasons of dissatisfaction.”

Daugs said, “We do not need another pilot project, we do not need another lawsuit, we do not need another child reaching adulthood only to end up homeless or headed for incarceration, we do not need another child fatality .... Our kids can’t wait.”