

April 11, 2018

Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. My name is Adelaide Grace. I am the administrator at Monroe County Children and Youth Services and have held this position for 13 years and have been in the field of county child welfare for over 30 years.

Recent concerns with State Civil Service Commission (SCSC) testing have prompted my testimony and I thank you for the opportunity to address these concerns.

SCSC has provided us with a merit-based system of hiring that has been, at times, cumbersome and frustrating, but has also given participating counties the ability to hire merit-qualified employees without regard for outside pressures. SCSC acts as a clearinghouse and testing facility for us and decreases the administrative burden on county human resources departments and on county agencies.

Those things said grave concerns arose in October 2017 when, without notice, testing was shut down for Caseworker I and II, Social Service Aide, Clerk Typist, Fiscal Technician and County Casework Supervisor. To date, these tests have yet to re-open and the short and long-term effect on Children and Youth agencies is devastating. In November 2017, I was approached by the dean of our local community college who asked me to speak with a student who was interested in becoming a Social Service Aide while she pursued her education. She, after speaking with me, recruited 3 other students who were interested and they attempted to schedule testing by going to the SCSC website only to learn that testing was closed. The student telephoned Monroe County Children and Youth for guidance which was our *first* knowledge of testing closures because SCSC had used an outdated (5 years) email address to send notification on October 23, 2017.

From the front to the back door of my agency, the closed positions have had damaging and potentially harmful effects. In a field where turnover is heavy, retention is difficult, caseloads are dangerously high and our service population is the most vulnerable and helpless, any delay in the hiring process is serious, but a 6-7 month delay at the very first step is unconscionable. Caseworkers are dependent upon support staff (social service aides) to assist with paperwork, transportation, school registration, visit supervision. That testing is closed. The agency as a whole is dependent upon its first points of contact who are receptionists and telephone staff who greet consumers and direct them to proper helping staff. That testing is closed. Caseworkers deserve the support of supervisors. That testing is closed. Counties rely upon state and federal income to run effectively and absent qualified fiscal staff, the receipt of these funds can be delayed causing a negative ripple effect on county general funds. This testing, too, is closed.

In the area of staff retention, those numbers of caseworkers who were already on a SCSC list before the October closing remain on a list if they have not been hired. However, that list is a state-wide list containing candidates from every county in the commonwealth, few, if any of whom are going to accept employment hundreds of miles away. When we are unable to develop a local pool of available hires, we are forced to hire those from

contiguous counties who leave our agency as soon as something local is available. At that point, we have invested considerable time and money in their training and they have developed relationships with their clients which are now disrupted as the agency is forced to reassign their cases to already over-burdened staff.

In non-caseworker/supervisor positions, Monroe County has been able to backfill through temporary agencies such as Manpower. At present, we have 4 Manpower temps who could and would take the SCSC tests for Social Service Aide and Clerk Typist. At this point in their employments, 3 of the 4 would already have been eligible for full benefits as county employees, including earned vacation, pension, sick time, holiday pay, and would have been earning seniority at the same time. Instead, they must wait until testing reopens, a test is scheduled for their respective positions, their test is scored, their name is placed on a list, and the listing is released to the county. Then all available candidates must be surveyed/contacted and scheduled for interviews, offered employment based upon position on the list, at which point the county hiring process begins.

We have now missed the prime hiring periods for caseworkers and aides which are mid-year and spring graduations. Longitudinally, the deficits created by the decision to close essential testing will be felt for years to come. Our kids are waiting for safety, shelter, food, emotional stability and permanency, and in some instances, for their parents to grow up. Is it fair to ask them to wait until the system mandated to protect them grows up as well?