



STATE OF MICHIGAN
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
LANSING

GRETCHEN WHITMER
GOVERNOR

ELIZABETH HERTEL
DIRECTOR

July 8, 2024

Doug Ringler, CPA, CIA
Auditor General
201 N. Washington Square
Victor Center, Sixth Floor
Lansing, MI 48933-1321

Dear Auditor General:

This letter addresses your most recent audit report, which is an update of a 2018 OAG audit uncovering a series of issues with how the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) handled child welfare investigations during the Snyder administration.

My team worked in good faith to provide your team with the most accurate and relative information available in hopes that you would share it fairly and in full context with the people of Michigan. Taxpayers deserve to know the significant progress made to keep kids safe and families together.

Unfortunately, it appeared from the start of this process that the OAG would be reluctant to acknowledge the program's significant results, irrespective of the facts. We find your actions troubling for several reasons: Your findings do not reflect non-compliance with established statute and MDHHS policies. Instead, they suggest a failure to meet standards that appear to have been arbitrarily devised by the audit itself. This is arbitrary and injects a level of unpredictability that undermines the entire audit process. **This action is unethical and biased.**

In the first observation, you format the audit to falsely suggest that MDHHS does not require an assessment of child safety within 24 hours of receiving a report of child abuse or neglect. You minimized and disregarded the immediate safety assessment performed by CPS during the intake process. This deception is clearly intended to inflame emotions and downplay the significant progress made by MDHHS since the Snyder era. **This action is unethical and biased.**

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Your “observations” appear to be agenda-driven and lack supporting data. You incorrectly suggest that MDHHS policies are less stringent than those found in Kentucky and North Carolina. Furthermore, you had to know these baseless observations would lead a casual reader to conclude, incorrectly, that you have evidence that MDHHS moves too slowly and requires too high of a burden of proof in responding to allegations of child abuse. **This action is unethical and biased.**

In each above example, you exceeded the scope and expertise of your office. My team used the OAG consultation process to request that you address our concerns before issuing the final report. You refused to do so. While we welcome your oversight and embrace our responsibility to strive for perfection in an imperfect world, my team and I are deeply disappointed with the fundamentally biased nature of your report.

Using small sample sizes and focusing on bureaucratic minutia, **your report virtually ignores the substantial progress MDHHS has made since the Synder era to comply with best practices.** The fact is federal court monitors [recently](#) found nearly 100% compliance for the timeliness and staffing of child abuse investigations, and in response, a federal judge dramatically reduced requirements for court oversight. In your own audit, MDHHS was found to have an 88% compliance rate.

The audit dwells more on process and paperwork issues than the efforts of MDHHS staff to make kids safer and families stronger. For example, your definition of “commencing” a child welfare investigation is an opaque and bureaucratic roadblock that distracts from practices at MDHHS that are making children safer. You repeatedly suggest that MDHHS changed its policies to no real effect, and yet you ignored or buried our evidence of progress.

The public servants and policies at MDHHS are not perfect. We have more work to do, and we will never stop improving how we protect Michigan children from the dangers of the modern world.

Historically the OAG has had an important role in providing valuable feedback to help departments move forward. Unfortunately, the practices adopted in this audit fall outside the purview of the Office of the Auditor General. It cannot be denied that **your process was deceitful and dishonest, leading to a final product that is unhelpful to Michigan’s children.**

Sincerely,



Elizabeth Hertel
Director

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