United States General Accounting Office

GAO

Report to Congressional Committees

May 2002

D.C. FAMILY COURT

Additional Actions Should Be Taken to Fully Implement Its Transition

GAO-02-584

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Abbreviations

ASFA	Adoption and Safe Families Act
CFSA	Child and Family Services Agency
GAO	General Accounting Office
IJIS	Integrated Justice Information System
RFP	Request for Proposal

G A O
Accountability * Integrity * Reliability

United States General Accounting Office
Washington, DC 20548

May 6, 2002

The Honorable Mary Landrieu, Chairwoman
The Honorable Mike DeWine,
Ranking Minority Member
Subcommittee on the District of Columbia
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate

The Honorable Joe Knollenberg, Chairman
The Honorable Chaka Fattah,
Ranking Minority Member
Subcommittee on the District of Columbia
Committee on Appropriations
House of Representatives

In January 2002, the District of Columbia Family Court Act of 2001 (P.L. 107-114) was enacted to, among other things, (1) redesignate the Family Division of the Superior Court of the District of Columbia as the Family Court of the Superior Court, (2) recruit trained and experienced judges to serve in the Family Court, and (3) promote consistency and efficiency in the assignment of judges to the Family Court and in the consideration of actions and proceedings in the Family Court. The passage of this act represented the first major overhaul of the Superior Court's Family Division in 3 decades. The Congress, in considering such an overhaul, found that poor communication among participants in the child welfare system, a weak organizational structure, and a lack of case management were serious problems plaguing the Family Division.

As a first step in initiating changes to the Family Division, the Family Court Act required the chief judge of the Superior Court to submit a transition plan outlining the proposed operation of the Family Court. The Congress also required that the chief judge submit the transition plan to the U.S. General Accounting Office (GAO) and that, within 30 calendar days after submission of the plan by the Superior Court, we prepare an analysis of the contents and effectiveness of the plan in meeting the requirements of the Family Court Act. To assess the statutory compliance of the transition plan, we compared the plan's contents to the

requirements of the act. We based our analysis of the transition plan, in part, on discussions with court and child welfare experts,[1] juvenile and family court judges across the country, and officials from the District of Columbia Superior Court and the Family Court. To supplement our analysis of the transition plan, we also asked several independent court experts to examine the plan and highlight its strengths and areas that may need more attention.

We conducted our work from February 2002 through April 2002 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

Results In Brief

The contents of the plan show that the Superior Court has made progress in planning the transition of its Family Division to a Family Court, but the plan also shows that some challenges remain. The Superior Court's transition plan addresses most, but not all, of the required elements outlined in the act. For example, the plan identifies the number of judges and magistrate judges the Family Court will need to conduct its work and outlines an approach for closing or transferring cases from other divisions of the Superior Court to the Family Court. However, the plan does not include (1) a request that the Judicial Nomination Commission[2] recruit and the president nominate the additional judges the court believes are necessary, (2) a determination of the number of nonjudicial staff needed for the Family Court, (3) information on whether the judges who have been selected for the court meet all required qualifications, and (4) information on how the court determined the number of magistrate judges to hire under the expedited process provided for in the District of Columbia Family Court Act. In addition, although not specifically required by the act, the plan includes information on performance management. However, the plan enumerates performance measures that are oriented more toward the court's processes, such as whether hearings are held on

[1]We interviewed officials from a variety of organizations, such as the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges; the National Center for State Courts; the Center for Families, Children and the Courts at the University of Baltimore; and the Child Welfare League of America.

[2]The Commission is comprised of seven individuals, one of whom is a judge, who by law must be a United States District judge. The commission is responsible for recruiting potential judges for the Superior Court of the District of Columbia and forwarding its recommendations to the president. The president, in turn, nominates judges to serve on the Superior Court with the advice and consent of the U.S. Senate.

time, than on outcomes. Developing measures that focus on outcomes for children and families could help to optimize the court's performance.

Furthermore, the plan reveals two critical factors that affect the transition to a Family Court. Full implementation of the transition hinges on timely completion of a complex series of interdependent plans intended to obtain and renovate physical space to house the court and its functions and on developing automated systems. For example, the plan explains how the abuse and neglect cases currently being heard by judges in other divisions of the Superior Court will be closed or transferred to the Family Court; however, the plan states that the complete transfer of these cases can only occur if additional judges and magistrate judges are hired, trained, and housed in appropriate space. All required space may not be available, as currently planned, to support the additional judges the Family Court needs to perform its work in accordance with the act, making it uncertain as to when the court can complete its transition. In addition, the development and application of the District of Columbia Courts' Integrated Justice Information System (IJIS)[3] will be critical for the Family Court to be able to operate effectively, evaluate its performance, and meet its judicial goals in the context of the changes mandated by the Family Court Act. The Family Court's current reliance on nonintegrated automated systems hampers its implementation. In February 2002,[4] we reported on a number of factors that significantly increase the risks associated with developing IJIS. Recognizing these challenges, the court has initiated significant actions that, if properly implemented, will help reduce these risks, such as providing the needed specificity for its system requirements. Still, the court faces continued challenges, such as effectively implementing processes that are necessary to reduce IJIS risks to acceptable levels and avoiding a schedule-driven effort.

To ensure that the Superior Court complies with the requirements of the Family Court Act and conducts an effective transition to the Family Court, we are recommending that the Superior Court supplement its transition plan by (1) identifying the number of nonjudicial staff needed for the

[3]Faced with a myriad of nonintegrated systems that do not provide the necessary information to support its overall mission, the DC Courts is in the process of acquiring a replacement system called IJIS. See U.S. General Accounting Office, *DC Courts: Disciplined Processes Critical to Successful System Acquisition*, GAO-02-316, (Washington, D.C.: 2002) for more details on the court's planning of IJIS.

[4]U.S. General Accounting Office, *DC Courts: Disciplined Processes Critical to Successful System Acquisition*, GAO-02-316, (Washington, D.C.: 2002).

Family Court, (2) determining the number of individuals identified in the plan that meet the qualifications for judges, and (3) providing an analysis of how the court identified the number of magistrate judges needed under the expedited appointment process. In addition, we are recommending that the Superior Court identify performance measures to track progress toward positive outcomes for children and families the Family Court services. In commenting on a draft of this report, the Superior Court concurred with our recommendations and said that the transition plan is a working document that will undergo continuous improvement and revision.

Background

The District of Columbia Family Court Act of 2001 (P.L. 107-114) was enacted on January 8, 2002. The act stated that, not later than 90 days after the date of the enactment, the chief judge of the Superior Court shall submit to the president and Congress a transition plan for the Family Court of the Superior Court and shall include in the plan the following:

- The chief judge's determination of the role and function of the presiding judge of the Family Court.
- The chief judge's determination of the number of judges needed to serve on the Family Court.
- The chief judge's determination of the number of magistrate judges[5] of the Family Court needed for appointment under Section 11-1732, District of Columbia Code.
- The chief judge's determination of the appropriate functions of such magistrate judges, together with the compensation of and other personnel matters pertaining to such magistrate judges.
- A plan for case flow, case management, and staffing needs (including the needs for both judicial and nonjudicial personnel) for the Family Court, including a description of how the Superior Court will handle the one family/one judge requirement pursuant to Section 11-1104(a) for all cases and proceedings assigned to the Family Court.

[5]A magistrate judge is a local judicial official entrusted with administration of the law, but whose jurisdiction may be limited.

- A plan for space, equipment, and other physical needs and requirements during the transition, as determined in consultation with the Administrator of General Services.

- An analysis of the number of magistrate judges needed under the expedited appointment procedures established under Section 6(d) in reducing the number of pending actions and proceedings within the jurisdiction of the Family Court.

- A proposal for the disposition or transfer to the Family Court of child abuse and neglect actions pending as of the date of enactment of the act (which were initiated in the Family Division but remain pending before judges serving in other Divisions of the Superior Court as of such date) in a manner consistent with applicable federal and District of Columbia law and best practices, including best practices developed by the American Bar Association and the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges.

- An estimate of the number of cases for which the deadline for disposition or transfer to the Family Court cannot be met and the reasons why such deadline cannot be met.

- The chief judge's determination of the number of individuals serving as judges of the Superior Court who meet the qualifications for judges of the Family Court and are willing and able to serve on the Family Court. If the chief judge determines that the number of individuals described in the act is less than 15, the plan is to include a request that the Judicial Nomination Commission recruit and the president nominate additional individuals to serve on the Superior Court who meet the qualifications for judges of the Family Court, as may be required to enable the chief judge to make the required number of assignments.

The Family Court Act states that the number of judges serving on the Family Court of the Superior Court cannot exceed 15. These judges must meet certain qualifications, such as having training or expertise in family law, certifying to the chief judge of the Superior Court that he or she intends to serve the full term of service and that he or she will participate in the ongoing training programs conducted for judges of the Family Court. The act also allows the court to hire and use magistrate judges to hear Family Court cases. Magistrate judges must also meet certain qualifications, such as holding U.S. citizenship, being an active member of the D.C. Bar, and having not fewer than 3 years of training or experience in the practice of family law as a lawyer or judicial officer. The act further states that the chief judge shall appoint individuals to serve as magistrate

judges not later than 60 days after the date of enactment of the act. The magistrate judges hired under this expedited appointment process are to assist in implementing the transition plan and, in particular, assist with the transition or disposal of child abuse and neglect proceedings not currently assigned to judges in the Family Court.

The Superior Court submitted its transition plan on April 5, 2002. The plan consists of three volumes. Volume I contains information on how the court will address case management issues, including organizational and human capital[6] requirements. Volume II contains information on the development of IJIS and its planned applications. In volume III, the court addresses the physical space it needs to house and operate the Family Court.

The D.C. Courts includes three main entities—the Superior Court, the Court of Appeals, and the Court System—and provides the overall organizational framework for judicial operations. The Superior Court contains five major operating divisions: Civil Division, Criminal Division, Family Court, Probate Division, and the Tax Division, as well as the following additional divisions and units: Crime Victims Compensation Program, the Domestic Violence Unit, the Multi-Door Dispute Resolution Division, and the Special Operations Division. The Court of Appeals reviews all appeals from the Superior Court, as well as decisions and orders of District of Columbia government administrative agencies. The Executive Office performs various administrative management functions, and directly supervises the Court System divisions, which support both the Court of Appeals and the Superior Court. Also, the Joint Committee on Judicial Administration in the District of Columbia serves as the policy-making entity for the D.C. Courts. The chief judges of the Superior Court and the Court of Appeals serve on this committee. In addition, a second Court of Appeals judge, elected by the Court of Appeals judges, and two Superior Court judges, elected by their colleagues, serve on the Joint Committee.

Courts interact with various organizations and operate in the context of many different programmatic requirements. In the District, the Family Court frequently interacts with the District's child welfare agency—the Child and Family Services Agency (CFSA)—a key organization responsible for helping children obtain permanent homes. CFSA must comply with federal laws and other requirements, including the Adoption and Safe

[6]Human capital refers to people within an organization.

Families Act (ASFA), which placed new responsibilities on child welfare agencies nationwide.[7] ASFA introduced new time periods for moving children who have been removed from their homes to permanent home arrangements and penalties for noncompliance. For example, ASFA requires states to hold a permanency planning hearing not later than 12 months after the child is considered to have entered foster care. Permanent placements include return home to the birth parents and adoption.

The Transition Plan Reveals Progress and Challenges in Planning the Transition to the Family Court

The Family Court transition plan provides information on most, but not all, elements required by the Family Court Act; however, some aspects of case management, training, and performance evaluation are unclear. For example, the plan describes the Family Court's method for transferring child abuse and neglect cases to the Family Court, its one family/one judge case management principle,[8] and the number and roles of judges and magistrate judges.[9] However, the plan does not (1) include a request for judicial nomination, (2) indicate the number of nonjudicial staff needed for the Family Court, (3) indicate if the 12 judges who volunteered for the Family Court meet all of the qualifications outlined in the act, and (4) state how the number of magistrate judges to hire under the expedited process was determined. In addition, although not specifically required by the act, the plan does not describe the content of its training programs and does not include a full range of measures by which the court can evaluate its progress in ensuring better outcomes for children.

[7]For additional details on the challenges facing the District of Columbia's child welfare system and implementation of ASFA, see U.S. General Accounting Office, *District of Columbia Child Welfare: Long-Term Challenges to Ensuring Children's Well-Being*, GAO-01-191, (Washington, D.C.: 2000) and *Foster Care: States' Early Experiences Implementing the Adoption and Safe Families Act*, GAO/HEHS-00-1, (Washington, D.C.: 1999).

[8]The Family Court Act requires the Family Court, to the greatest extent practicable, feasible, and lawful, to assign one judge to handle a case from initial filing to final disposition, as well as to handle related family cases that are subsequently filed.

[9]In the Family Court, two Family Court judges—the presiding and deputy presiding judges—will primarily handle the administrative functions of the court. Family Court judges are judges of the Superior Court who have received training or have expertise in family law. These judges will hear a variety of cases in the court. Family Court magistrate judges are qualified individuals with expertise and training in family law. These magistrate judges will also hear various Family Court cases.

The Transition Plan Includes a Description of the Court's Plan for Transferring Abuse and Neglect Cases to the Family Court

The transition plan establishes criteria for transferring cases to the Family Court and states that the Family Court intends to have all child abuse and neglect cases pending before judges serving in other divisions of the Superior Court closed or transferred into the Family Court by June 2003. According to the plan, the court has asked each Superior Court judge not serving in the Family Court to review his or her caseload to identify those cases that meet the criteria established by the court for the first phase of case transfer back to the Family Court for attention by magistrate judges hired under the expedited process provided in the act. Cases identified for transfer include those in which (1) the child is 18 years of age and older, the case is being monitored primarily for the delivery of services, and no recent allegations of abuse or neglect exist; and (2) the child is committed to the child welfare agency and is placed with a relative in a kinship care program. Cases that the court believes may not be candidates for transfer by June 2002 include those the judge believes transferring the case would delay permanency. The court expects that older cases will first be reviewed for possible closure and expects to transfer the entire abuse and neglect caseloads of several judges serving in other divisions of the Superior Court to the Family Court. Using the established criteria to review cases, the court estimates that 1,500 cases could be candidates for immediate transfer.

The act also requires the court to estimate the number of cases that cannot be transferred into Family Court in the timeframes specified. The plan provides no estimate because the court's proposed transfer process assumes all cases will be closed or transferred, based on the outlined criteria. However, the plan states that the full transfer of all cases is partially contingent on hiring three new judges.

The Transition Plan Describes the Family Court's Approach to Managing Its Cases, but the Court Could Consider Additional Approaches to Assessing Implementation

The transition plan identifies the way in which the Family Court will implement the one family/one judge approach and improve its case management practices; however, some aspects of case management, training, and performance evaluation are unclear. The plan indicates that the Family Court will implement the one family/one judge approach by assigning all cases involving the same family to one judicial team—comprised of a Family Court judge and a magistrate judge. This assignment will begin with the initial hearing by the magistrate judge on the team and continue throughout the life of the case. Juvenile and family court experts indicated that this team approach is realistic and a good model of judicial collaboration. One expert said that such an approach provides for continuity if either team member is absent. Another expert added that, given the volume of cases that must be heard, the team

approach can ease the burden on judicial resources by permitting the magistrate judge to make recommendations and decisions, thereby allowing the Family Court judge time to schedule and hear trials and other proceedings more quickly. Court experts also praised the proposed staggered terms for judicial officials—newly hired judges, magistrate judges, and judges who are already serving on the Superior Court will be appointed to the Family Court for varying numbers of years—which can provide continuity while recognizing the need to rotate among divisions in the Superior Court.

The plan also describes other elements of the Family Court's case management process, such as how related cases will be assigned and a description of how many judges will hear which types of cases. For example, the plan states that, in determining how to assign cases, preference will generally be given to the judge or magistrate judge who has the most familiarity with the family. In addition, the plan states that (1) all Family Court judges will handle post-disposition child abuse and neglect cases; (2) 10 judges will handle abuse and neglect cases from initiation to closure as part of a judicial team; (3) 1 judge will handle abuse and neglect cases from initiation to closure independently (not as part of a team); and (4) certain numbers of judges will handle other types of cases, such as domestic relations cases, mental health trials, and complex family court cases. However, because the transition plan focuses primarily on child abuse and neglect cases, this information does not clearly explain how the total workload associated with the approximately 24,000[10] cases under the court's jurisdiction will be handled. One court expert we consulted commented on the transition plan's almost exclusive focus on child welfare cases, making it unclear, the expert concluded, how other cases not involving child abuse and neglect will be handled.

In addition to describing case assignments, the plan identifies actions the court plans to take to centralize intake. According to the plan, a centralized office will encompass all filing and intake functions that various clerks' offices—such as juvenile, domestic relations, paternity and support, and mental health—in the Family Court currently carry out. As

[10]During 2001, court activity included 13,132 filings, 13,957 dispositions, and 24,373 pending cases (including approximately 5,100 child abuse and neglect cases—most of which were being handled by judges outside of the Family Division).

part of centralized intake, case coordinators[11] will identify any related cases that may exist in the Family Court. To do this, the coordinator will ensure that a new "Intake/Cross Reference Form" will be completed by various parties to a case and also check the computer databases serving the Family Court. As a second step, the court plans to use alternative dispute resolution to resolve cases more quickly and expand initial hearings to address many of the issues that the court previously handled later in the life of the case. As a third step, the plan states that the Family Court will provide all affected parties speedy notice of court proceedings and implement strict policies for the handling of cases—such as those for granting continuances[12]—although it does not indicate who is responsible for developing the policies or the status of their development.

The plan states that the court will conduct evaluations to assess whether components of the Family Court were implemented as planned and whether modifications are necessary; the court could consider using additional measures to focus on outcomes for children. One court expert said that the court's development of a mission statement and accompanying goals and objectives frames the basis for developing performance standards. The expert also said that the goals and standards are consistent with those of other family courts that strive to prevent further deterioration of a family's situation and to focus decision-making on the needs of those individuals served by the court. However, evaluation measures listed in the plan are oriented more toward the court's processes, such as whether hearings are held on time, than on outcomes. According to a court expert, measures must also account for outcomes the court achieves for children. Measures could include the number of finalized adoptions that did not disrupt, reunifications that do not fail, children who remain safe and are not abused again while under court jurisdiction or in foster care, and the proportion of children who successfully achieve permanency. In addition, the court will need to determine how it will gather the data necessary to measure each team's progress in ensuring such outcomes or in meeting the requirements of ASFA, and the court has not yet established a baseline from which to judge its performance.

[11]Coordinators will provide day-to-day liaison between judges and magistrate judges, legal counsel, litigants, court clerks, and the child welfare agency. They will also be responsible for monitoring the cases for ASFA compliance.

[12]When a continuance is granted by the judge, the case is rescheduled for another day.

The Transition Plan Addresses the Number and Role of Judicial Officers, but Other Human Capital Issues Remain Unclear

The transition plan states that the court has determined that 15 judges are needed to carry out the duties of the court and that 12 judges have volunteered to serve on the court, but does not address recruitment and the nomination of the three additional judges. Court experts stated that the court's analysis to identify the appropriate number of judges is based on best practices identified by highly credible national organizations and is, therefore, pragmatic and realistic. However, the plan only provides calculations for how it determined that the court needed 22 judges and magistrate judges to handle child abuse and neglect cases. The transition plan does not include a methodology for how it determined that the court needed a total of 32 judges and magistrate judges for its total caseload of child abuse and neglect cases, as well as other family cases, such as divorce and child support, nor does it explain how anticipated increases in cases will be handled.[13] In addition, the plan does not include a request that the Judicial Nomination Commission recruit and the president nominate the additional three individuals to serve on the Superior Court, as required by the Family Court Act. At a recent hearing on the court's implementation of the Family Court Act, the chief judge of the Superior Court said that the court plans to submit its request in the fall of 2002.[14]

The Superior Court does not provide in the plan its determination of the number of nonjudicial staff needed. The court acknowledges that while it budgeted for a certain number of nonjudicial personnel based on current operating practices, determining the number of different types of personnel needed to operate the Family Court effectively is pending completion of a staffing study.[15]

Furthermore, the plan does not address the qualifications of the 12 judges who volunteered for the court. Although the plan states that these judges

[13]The transition plan states that three legislative proposals pending before the District of Columbia City Council could increase the size of the Family Court caseload—the Improved Child Abuse Investigations Amendment Act of 2001, the Mental Health Commitment Amendments Act of 2001, and the Standby Guardianship Act of 2001. However, no estimates of the anticipated increases were provided.

[14]The hearing was held before the Senate Subcommittee on DC Appropriations, April 24, 2002.

[15]D.C. Courts has hired Booz-Allen & Hamilton to conduct a workforce planning analysis over a 6-month period. The analysis and the development of a customized automated tool for ongoing workforce planning and analysis are scheduled to be complete by May 15, 2002. The courts contracted for this project in response to GAO's report, *D.C. Courts: Staffing Level Determination Could Be More Rigorous* (GAO/GGD-99-162, Aug. 27, 1999).

have agreed to serve full terms of service, according to the act, the chief judge of the Superior Court may not assign an individual to serve on the Family Court unless the individual also has training or expertise in family law and certifies that he or she will participate in the ongoing training programs conducted for judges of the Family Court. The act requires judges who had been serving in the Superior Court's Family Division at the time of its enactment to serve for a term of not fewer than 3 years, and that the 3-year term shall be reduced by the length of time already served in the Family Division. Since the transition plan does not identify which of the 12 volunteers had already been serving in the Family Division prior to the act and the length of time they had already served, the minimum remaining term length for each volunteer cannot be determined from the plan. In commenting on this report, the Superior Court said it will provide information on each judge's length of tenure in its first annual report to the Congress.

The transition plan describes the duties of judges assigned to the Family Court, as required by the act. Specifically, the plan describes the roles of the designated presiding judge, the deputy presiding judge, and the magistrate judges. The plan states that the presiding and deputy presiding judges will handle the administrative functions of the Family Court, ensure the implementation of the alternative dispute resolution projects, oversee grant-funded projects, and serve as back-up judges to all Family Court judges. These judges will also have a post-disposition[16] abuse and neglect caseload of more than 80 cases and will continue to consult and coordinate with other organizations (such as the child welfare agency), primarily by serving on 19 committees.[17] One court expert has observed that the list of committees to which the judges are assigned seems overwhelming and said that strong leadership by the judges could result in consolidation of some of the committees' efforts.

The plan also describes the duties of the magistrate judges, but does not provide all the information required by the act. Magistrate judges will be responsible for initial hearings in new child abuse and neglect cases and

[16]At the disposition hearing, a decision is made regarding who will have custody and control of the child, and a review is conducted of the reasonable efforts made to prevent the removal of the child from the home.

[17]These committees include the Child Welfare Leadership Team, the Mayor's Advisory Committee on Child Abuse and Neglect, and the Mayor's Advisory Committee on Permanent Families for Children.

the resolution of cases assigned to them by the Family Court judge to whose team they are assigned. They will also be assigned initial hearings in juvenile cases, noncomplex abuse and neglect trials, and the subsequent review and permanency hearings,[18] as well as a variety of other matters related to domestic violence, paternity and support, mental competency, and other domestic relations cases. As noted previously, one court expert said that the proposed use of the magistrate judges would ease the burden on judicial resources by permitting these magistrate judges to make recommendations and decisions. However, although specifically required by the act, the transition plan does not state how the court determined the number of magistrate judges to be hired under the expedited process. In addition, while the act outlines the qualifications of magistrate judges, it does not specifically require a discussion of qualifications of the newly hired magistrate judges in the transition plan. As a result, no information was provided, and whether these magistrate judges meet the qualifications outlined in the act is unknown. In commenting on this report, the Superior Court said that it considered the following in determining how many magistrate judges should be hired under the expedited process: optimal caseload size, available courtroom and office space, and safety and permanency of children. In addition, the court determined, based on its criteria, that 1,500 child abuse and neglect cases could be safely transferred to the Family Court during the initial transfer period and that a caseload of 300 cases each was appropriate for these judicial officers. As a result, the court appointed five magistrate judges on April 8, 2002.

A discussion of how the court will provide initial and ongoing training for its judicial and nonjudicial staff is also not required by the act, although the court does include relevant information about training. For example, the plan states that the Family Court will develop and implement a quarterly training program for Family Court judges, magistrate judges, and staff covering a variety of topics and that it will promote and encourage participation in cross-training.[19] In addition, the plan states new judges and magistrate judges will participate in a 2 to 3 week intensive training

[18]Review hearings are held to review case progress to ensure children spend the least possible time in temporary placement and to modify the family's case plan, as necessary. Permanency hearings decide the permanent placement of the child, such as returning home or being placed for adoption.

[19]Cross-training refers to the practice of bringing together various participants in the child welfare system to learn each other's roles and responsibilities. The act requires the court to use the resources of lawyers and legal professionals, social workers, and experts in the field of child development and other related fields in developing its cross-training program.

program, although it does not provide details on the content of such training for the five magistrate judges hired under the expedited process, even though they were scheduled to begin working at the court on April 8, 2002. One court expert said that a standard curriculum for all court-related staff and judicial officers should be developed and that judges should have manuals available outlining procedures for all categories of cases. In commenting on a draft of this report, the Superior Court said that the court has long had such manuals for judges serving in each division of the court. In our report on human capital, we said that an explicit link between the organization's training offerings and curricula and the competencies identified by the organization for mission accomplishment is essential.[20] Organization leaders can show their commitment to strategic human capital management by investing in professional development and mentoring programs that can also assist in meeting specific performance needs. These programs can include opportunities for a combination of formal and on-the-job training, individual development plans, and periodic formal assessments. Likewise, organizations should make fact-based determinations of the impact of its training and development programs to provide feedback for continuous improvement and ensure that these programs improve performance and help achieve organizational results. In commenting on this report, the Superior Court said that—although not included in the plan—it has an extensive training curriculum that will be fine-tuned prior to future training sessions.

[20]U.S. General Accounting Office, *Human Capital: A Self-Assessment Checklist for Agency Leaders*, GAO/OCG-00-14G (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 2000).

The Transition Plan Reveals That Challenges in Obtaining the Necessary Physical Space and in Developing a New Information System Could Impede Family Court Implementation

Two factors are critical to fully transitioning to the Family Court in a timely and effective manner: obtaining and renovating appropriate space for all new Family Court personnel and developing and installing a new automated information system, currently planned as part of the D.C. Courts IJIS system. The court acknowledges that its implementation plans may be slowed if appropriate space cannot be obtained in a timely manner. For example, the plan addresses how the abuse and neglect cases currently being heard by judges in other divisions of the Superior Court will be transferred to the Family Court but states that the complete transfer of cases hinges on the court's ability to hire, train, and provide appropriate space for additional judges and magistrate judges. In addition, the Family Court's current reliance on nonintegrated automated information systems that do not fully support planned court operations, such as the one family/one judge approach to case management, constrains its transition to a Family Court.

The Plan for Obtaining the Necessary Space and Facilities Carries a Number of Project Risks

The transition plan states that the interim space plan[21] carries a number of project risks. These include a very aggressive implementation schedule and a design that makes each part of the plan interdependent with other parts of the plan. The transition plan further states that the desired results cannot be reached if each plan increment does not take place in a timely fashion. For example, obtaining and renovating the almost 30,000 occupiable square feet of new court space needed requires a complex series of interrelated steps—from moving current tenants in some buildings to temporary space, to renovating the John Marshall level of the H. Carl Moultrie Courthouse by July 2003.

The Family Court of the Superior Court is currently housed in the H. Carl Moultrie Courthouse, and interim plans call for expanding and renovating additional space in this courthouse to accommodate the additional judges, magistrate judges, and staff who will help implement the Family Court Act. The court estimates that accommodating these personnel requires an additional 29,700 occupiable square feet, plus an undetermined amount for security and other amenities. Obtaining this space will require nonrelated D.C. Court entities to vacate space to allow for renovations, as well as

[21]The interim space plan addresses facility needs of the Family Court in response to the act. D.C. Courts is also developing a comprehensive master plan to address the courts' needs through 2012.

require tenants in other buildings to move in order to house the staff who have been displaced.

The plan calls for renovations under tight deadlines, and all required space may not be available, as currently planned, to support the additional judges the Family Court needs to perform its work in accordance with the act, making it uncertain as to when the court can fully complete its transition. For example, D.C. Courts recommends that a portion of the John Marshall level of the H. Carl Moultrie Courthouse, currently occupied by civil court functions, be vacated and redesigned for the new courtrooms and court-related support facilities. Although some space is available on the fourth floor of the courthouse for the four magistrate judges to be hired by December 2002, renovations to the John Marshall level are tentatively scheduled for completion in July 2003—2 months after the court anticipates having three additional Family Court judges on board. Another D.C. Courts building—Building B—would be partially vacated by non-Court tenants and altered for use by displaced civil courts functions and other units temporarily displaced in future renovations. Renovations to Building B are scheduled to be complete by August 2002. Space for 30 additional Family Court-related staff, approximately 3,300 occupiable square feet, would be created in the H. Carl Moultrie Courthouse in an as yet undetermined location. Moreover, the Family Court's plan for acquiring additional space does not include alternatives that the court will pursue if its current plans for renovating space encounter delays or problems that could prevent it from using targeted space.

Reducing Risks in Developing the New Information System Critical to Meeting Family Court Goals

The Family Court Act calls for an integrated information technology system to support the goals it outlines, but a number of factors significantly increase the risks associated with attaining this goal, as we reported in February 2002. For example,

- The D.C. Courts had not yet implemented the disciplined processes necessary to reduce the risks associated with acquiring and managing IJIS to acceptable levels. A disciplined software development and acquisition effort maximizes the likelihood of achieving the intended results (performance) on schedule using available resources (costs).

- The requirements[22] contained in a draft Request for Proposal (RFP) for the information system lacked the necessary specificity to ensure that any defects in these requirements had been reduced to acceptable levels[23] and that the system would meet its users' needs. Studies have shown that problems associated with requirements definition are key factors in software projects that do not meet their cost, schedule, and performance goals.

- The requirements contained in the draft RFP did not directly relate to industry standards. As a result, inadequate information was available for prospective vendors and others to readily map systems built upon these standards to the needs of the D.C. Courts.

Prior to issuing our February 2002 report, we discussed our findings with D.C. Courts officials who generally concurred with our findings. The officials said that the D.C. Courts would not go forward with the project until the necessary actions had been taken to reduce the risks associated with developing the new information system. In our report, we made several recommendations designed to reduce the risks. In April 2002, we met with D.C. Courts officials to discuss the actions taken on our recommendations and found that significant actions have been initiated that, if properly implemented, will help reduce the risks associated with developing the new system. For example, D.C. Courts is

- beginning the work to provide the needed specificity for its system requirements. This includes soliciting requirements from the users and ensuring that the requirements are properly sourced (e.g., traced back to their origin). According to D.C. Courts officials, this work has identified significant deficiencies in the original requirements that we discussed in our February report. These deficiencies relate to new tasks D.C. Courts must undertake. For example, the Family Court Act requires D.C. Courts to interface IJIS with several other District government computer systems. These tasks were not within the scope of the original requirements that we reported on in our

[22]Requirements represent the blueprint that system developers and program managers use to design, develop, and acquire a system. Requirements should be consistent with one another, verifiable, and directly traceable to higher-level business or functional requirements.

[23]Although all projects of this size can be expected to have some requirements-related defects, the goal is to reduce the number of such defects so that they do not significantly affect cost, schedule, or performance.

February 2002 report.

- issuing a Request for Information to obtain additional information on commercial products that should be considered by the D.C. Courts during its acquisitions. This helps the requirements management process by identifying requirements that are not supported by commercial products so that the D.C. Courts can reevaluate whether it needs to (1) keep the requirement or revise it to be in greater conformance with industry practices or (2) undertake a development effort to achieve the needed capability.

- developing a systems engineering life-cycle process for managing the D.C. Courts information technology efforts. This will help define the processes and events that should be performed from the time that a system is conceived until the system is no longer needed. Examples of processes used include requirements development, testing, and implementation.

- developing policies and procedures that will help ensure that the D.C. Courts' information technology investments comply with the requirements of the Clinger-Cohen Act of 1996 (P.L. 104-106).[24]

- developing the processes that will enable the D.C. Courts to achieve a level 2 rating—this means basic project management processes are established to track performance, cost, and schedule—on the Software Engineering Institute's[25] Capability Maturity Model.[26]

[24]D.C. Courts has decided to apply the Clinger-Cohen Act to its investments even though it is not required to do so. The act requires federal executive agencies to establish a process to maximize the value and assess and manage the risks of information technology investments. This process is to provide for, among other things, identifying for a proposed investment quantifiable measurements for determining the net benefits and risks of the investment, and minimum criteria for undertaking a particular investment, including specific quantitative and qualitative criteria for comparing and prioritizing alternative systems investment projects. Only by comparing the costs, benefits, and risks of a full range of technical options can agencies ensure that the best approaches are selected.

[25]The Software Engineering Institute is recognized for its experience in software development and acquisition processes. It has also developed methods and models that can be used to define disciplined processes and determine whether an organization has implemented them.

[26]Capability Maturity ModelSM (a service mark of Carnegie Mellon University and CMM is registered in the U. S. Patent and Trademark Office) provides a logical and widely accepted framework for baselining an organization's current process capabilities (i.e., strengths and weaknesses) and assessing whether an organization has the necessary process discipline in place to repeat earlier successes on similar projects.

In addition, D.C. Courts officials told us that they are developing a program modification plan that will allow the use of the existing (legacy) systems while the IJIS project proceeds. Although they recognize that maintaining two systems concurrently is expensive and causes additional resource needs, such as additional staff and training for them, these officials believe that they are needed to mitigate the risk associated with any delays in system implementation.

Although these are positive steps forward, D.C. Courts still faces many challenges in its efforts to develop an IJIS system that will meet its needs and fulfill the goals established by the act. The following sections discuss the challenges the D.C. Courts face.

Ensuring that the Systems Interfacing with IJIS Do Not Become the Weak Link

The Family Court Act calls for effectively interfacing information technology systems operated by the District government with IJIS. According to D.C. Courts officials, at least 14 District government systems will need to interface with IJIS. However, several of our reviews have noted problems in the District's ability to develop, acquire, and implement new systems.[27] The District's difficulties in effectively managing its information technology investments could lead to adverse impacts on the IJIS system. For example, the interface systems may not be able to provide the quality of data necessary to fully utilize IJIS's capabilities or provide the necessary data to support IJIS's needs. The D.C. Courts will need to ensure that adequate controls and processes have been implemented to mitigate the potential impacts associated with these risks.

Effectively Implementing the Disciplined Processes Needed to Reduce the Risks Associated with IJIS

The key to having a disciplined effort is to have disciplined processes in multiple areas. This is a complex task and will require the D.C. Courts to maintain its management commitment to implementing the necessary

[27]For example, see U.S. General Accounting Office, *District of Columbia: Weaknesses in Financial Management System Implementation*, GAO-01-489, (Washington, D.C.: Apr. 30, 2001); *District of Columbia: The District Has Not Adequately Planned for and Managed Its New Personnel and Payroll System*, GAO/AIMD-00-19, (Washington, D.C.: Dec. 17, 1999); and *District of Columbia: Software Acquisition Processes for A New Financial Management System*, GAO/AIMD-98-88, (Washington, D.C.: Apr. 30, 1998).

processes. In our February 2002 report, we highlighted several processes, such as requirements management, risk management, and testing that appeared critical to the development of IJIS.

Ensuring that the Requirements Used to Acquire IJIS Contain the Necessary Specificity to Reduce Requirement-Related Defects to Acceptable Levels

Although D.C. Courts officials have said that they are adopting a requirements management process that will address the concerns expressed in our February 2002 report, maintaining such a process will require management commitment and discipline.

Ensuring that Users Receive Adequate Training

As with any new system, adequately training the users is critical to its success. As we reported in April 2001,[28] one problem that hindered the implementation of the District's financial management system was its difficulty in adequately training the users of the system. In commenting on this report, the Superior Court said that $800,000 has been budgeted for staff training during the 3 years of implementation.

Avoiding a Schedule-Driven Effort

According to D.C. Courts officials, the Family Court Act establishes ambitious timeframes to convert to a family court. Although schedules are important, it is critical that the D.C. Courts follow an event-driven acquisition and development program rather than adopting a schedule-driven approach. Organizations that are schedule-driven tend to reduce or inadequately complete activities such as business process reengineering and requirements analysis. These tasks are frequently not considered "important" since many people view "getting the application in the hands of the user" as one of the more productive activities. However, the results of this approach are very predictable. Projects that do not perform planning and requirements functions well typically have to redo that work later. However, the costs associated with delaying the critical planning and

[28]U.S. General Accounting Office, *District of Columbia: Weaknesses in Financial Management System Implementation*, GAO-01-489, (Washington, D.C.: Apr. 30, 2001).

requirements activities is anywhere from 10 to 100 times the cost of doing it correctly in the first place.[29]

With respect to requirements, court experts report that effective technological support is critical to effective family court case management. One expert said that, at a minimum, the system should include the (1) identification of parties and their relationships; (2) tracking of case processing events through on-line inquiry; (3) generation of orders, forms, summons, and notices; and (4) production of statistical reports. The State Justice Institute's report on how courts are coordinating family cases[30] states that automated information systems, programmed to inform a court system of a family's prior cases, are a vital ingredient of case coordination efforts. The National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges echoes these findings by stating that effective management systems (1) have standard procedures for collecting data; (2) collect data about individual cases, aggregate caseload by judge, and the systemwide caseload; (3) assign an individual the responsibility of monitoring case processing; and (4) are user friendly.[31] While anticipating technological enhancements through IJIS, Superior Court officials said that the current information systems do not have the functionality required to implement the Family Court's one family/one judge case management principle. In providing technical clarifications on a draft of this report, the Superior Court reiterated a statement that the presiding judge of the Family Court made at the April 24, 2002, hearing. The presiding judge said that the Family Court is currently implementing the one family/one judge principle, but that existing court technology is cumbersome to use to identify family and other household members. Nonetheless, staff are utilizing the different databases, forms, intake interviews, questions from the bench, and other nontechnological means of identifying related cases within the Family Court.

[29]*Rapid Development: Taming Wild Software Schedules*, Bruce McConnell, (Microsoft Press).

[30]Flango, Carol R., Flango, Victor E., and Rubin, H. Ted, "*How are Courts Coordinating Family Cases?*", State Justice Institute, National Center for State Courts (Alexandria, VA: 1999).

[31]National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, *Information Management: A Critical Component of Good Practice in Child Abuse and Neglect Cases*, Technical Assistance Bulletin, Vol. II, No. 8 (Reno, NV: Dec.1998).

Conclusions

Basically, even though some important issues are not discussed, the Superior Court's transition plan represents a good effort at outlining the steps it will take to implement a Family Court. While the court has taken important steps to achieve efficient and effective operations, it still must address several statutory requirements included in the Family Court Act to achieve full compliance with the act. In addition, opportunities exist for the court to adopt other beneficial practices to help ensure it improves the timeliness of decisions in accordance with ASFA, that judges and magistrate judges are fully trained, and that case information is readily available to aid judges and magistrate judges in their decision making. Acknowledging the complex series of events that must occur in a timely way to achieve optimal implementation of the family court, the court recognizes that its plan for obtaining and renovating needed physical space warrants close attention to reduce the risk of project delays. In addition, the court has initiated important steps that begin to address many of the shortcomings we identified in our February 2002 report on its proposed information system. The effect of these actions will not be known for some time. The court's actions reflect its recognition that developing an automated information system for the Family Court will play a pivotal role in the court's ability to implement its improved case management framework. By following through on the steps it has begun to take and by evaluating its performance over time, the court may improve its implementation of the Family Court Act and provide a sound basis for assessing the extent to which it achieves desired outcomes for children.

Recommendations

To help ensure that the District of Columbia Superior Court complies with all statutory requirements contained in the District of Columbia Family Court Act, we recommend that the chief judge of the District of Columbia Superior Court supplement the court's transition plan by providing the following information:

- A determination of the number of nonjudicial staff needed for the Family Court when the staffing study is complete.
- A determination of the number of individuals identified in the transition plan to serve on the Family Court that meet the qualifications for judges on the Family Court.
- An analysis of how the Family Court identified the number of magistrate judges needed under the expedited appointment procedures.

While not required by the Family Court Act to be included in the Family Court's transition plan, the practices of courts in other jurisdictions, if

fully adopted, could optimize the court's performance. Toward achieving more efficient and effective operations, we recommend that the chief judge of the Superior Court of the District of Columbia consider identifying performance measures to track progress toward positive outcomes for the children and families the Family Court serves.

Agency Comments And Our Evaluation

We obtained comments on a draft of this report from the chief judge of the Superior Court. These comments are reproduced in appendix I. The court also provided technical clarifications, which we incorporated when appropriate.

The Superior Court generally agreed with the findings of our report and concurred with our recommendations. Regarding our recommendation on the number of nonjudicial staff needed for the Family Court, the Superior Court said that the results of the staffing study will be available shortly and will assist the Family Court in finalizing its staffing request. With regard to providing a determination of the number of individuals identified in the plan that meet the qualifications for judges on the Family Court, the Superior Court said that assignments are based on the judges' expressed preferences, an evaluation of judicial competencies, and the court's needs. The court also said that the chief judge had determined that all 12 Family Court judges were qualified, either through experience or training, or both, to serve on the Family Court. Regarding our recommendation that the Superior Court provide its analysis of how the Family Court identified the number of magistrate judges needed under the expedited appointment procedures, the Superior Court provided an explanation that we incorporated in this report. In commenting on the need to develop a training plan, the court said that it has developed training programs that are closely aligned with the mission, goals, and objectives of the Family Court. Therefore, we deleted this recommendation in our final report. Finally, regarding the development of outcome measures, the court said that it will include information on child-related outcomes and agrees that this type of information would contribute to a greater understanding of how children and families before the court are faring.

The Superior Court also commented that the presiding judge of the Family Court, in consultation with the chief judge of the Superior Court, is responsible for implementation of all aspects of the Family Court Act. In addition, the court said that, while the court has not yet completed its development of baseline data for all components of the Family Court, it has data in two critical areas—case processing times for abuse and neglect cases prior to the implementation of ASFA and after its implementation.

We are sending copies of this report to the Office of Management and Budget, the Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management, Restructuring, and the District of Columbia, Senate Committee on Governmental Affairs; and the Subcommittee on the District of Columbia, House Committee on Government Reform. We are also sending copies to the Joint Committee on Judicial Administration in the District of Columbia, the chief judge of the Superior Court of the District of Columbia, the presiding judge of the Family Court of the Superior Court of the District of Columbia, and the executive director of the District of Columbia Courts. Copies of this report will also be made available to others upon request.

If you have any questions about this report, please contact me on (202) 512-8403. Other contacts and staff acknowledgments are listed in appendix II.

Cornelia M. Ashby
Director, Education, Workforce, and
Income Security Issues

Appendix I: Comments from the Superior Court of the District of Columbia

Superior Court of the District of Columbia
Washington, D.C. 20001

Rufus King III
Chief Judge

(202) 879-1600

May 1, 2002

Cornelia Ashby
Director, Education, Workforce, and Income Security Issues
United States General Accounting Office
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Ms. Ashby:

In accordance with your request of April 30, 2002, I enclose for your consideration comments on behalf of the Superior Court of the District of Columbia to the draft report entitled *D.C. Family Court: Additional Actions Should be Taken to Fully Implement Its Transition.*

The Court is gratified by your conclusion that our Transition Plan "represents a good effort." Having been selected as a "Model Family Court" by the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, the Court plans to build on this effort to develop a Family Court which truly serves as a national model for exceptional service to children and families.

The Superior Court of the District of Columbia has reviewed the GAO report findings as fully as possible in the time allotted. If you have questions or concerns, please contact me at (202) 879-1600.

Sincerely,

Rufus King, III

Court Response to GAO Recommendations
(see Draft Report p. 21)

Recommendation: **That the chief judge of the District of Columbia Superior Court supplement the transition plan by providing the following information to the President and Congress:**

- **A determination of the number of non-judicial staff needed for the Family Court when the staffing study is complete.**
- **A determination of the number of individuals identified in the transition plan to serve on the Family Court that meet the qualifications for judges on the Family Court.**
- **An analysis of how the Family Court identified the number of magistrates needed under the expedited appointment procedures.**

Response. The transition plan submitted to Congress is a working document that will undergo continuous improvement and revision. The Court would be pleased to include our analyses of the above issues in a supplementary report to Congress and the President. At this time, the following information is provided.

A determination of the number of non-judicial staff needed for the Family Court when the staffing study is complete.

In response to a GAO report that found that the Court could be more rigorous in determining staffing levels, the Court contracted with the consulting firm of Booz-Allen Hamilton, Inc. to conduct a staffing study and develop a methodology and related software that would objectively quantify staffing needs. The results of this study will be available shortly, and will assist the Family Court in finalizing its staffing request.

Further, the Court is engaged in discussions with a business process reengineering consulting firm that has expertise in court administration to assist the Family Court in reengineering its processes and procedures in coordination with the full implementation of the Family Court Act and the development of an integrated justice information system (IJIS). This

project should also address staffing issues, and will help to ensure optimal services to children and families in the District.

A determination of the number of individuals identified in the transition plan to serve on the Family Court that meet the qualifications for judges on the Family Court.

The Chief Judge makes associate judge assignments based on the judges' expressed preferences, an evaluation of judicial competencies, and the Court's needs. Chief Judge King determined that all twelve Family Court judges are qualified, either through experience or training, or both, to serve in the Family Court as required by the Act. He has received certifications from these judges that they will serve three years and participate in on-going training.

An analysis of how the Family Court identified the number of magistrates needed under the expedited appointment procedures.

While the Court's transition plan did not include information on how the number of initial magistrate judges was determined, the following were the primary considerations: optimal caseload size, available courtroom and office space, and safety and permanency of children. The Court determined the number of magistrate judges needed under the expedited process based on the number of children whose cases could be safely returned to the Family Court without the child experiencing any delay in permanency. Prior experience has shown that a gradual reassignment of cases to other judicial officers is the safest way to transfer cases. The Court established a set of criteria (as outlined on page 39 of the Plan) for the return of cases. Using that selection process and taking into account the concerns of the Office of Corporation Counsel and the Child and Family Services Agency about the number of judges before whom social workers and attorneys appear, the Court determined that 1,500 cases could be safely transferred to the Family Court during the initial transfer period. Based on the number of cases eligible for immediate transfer and the intent to keep caseloads manageable for the new magistrate judges, it was determined that a caseload of 300 cases was appropriate for these judicial officers. As a result, the Court appointed five magistrate judges on April 8, 2002.

Develop a training program for judges, magistrates, and other court personnel that is linked with the mission, goals, and objectives of the Family Court.

The Court has developed training programs for all judges, magistrate judges and court personnel that are closely aligned with the mission, goals and objectives of the Family Court. This follows comprehensive family law training for all judges that was provided on an annual basis.

Identify performance measures to track progress toward positive outcomes for the children and families the Family Court serves.

The Court will assess performance based on both process and outcome measures. The performance measures included in the Plan are consistent with a best practice model and are designed to produce better outcomes for children. However, the Court agrees that the types of information highlighted in the GAO report would contribute to a greater understanding of how children and families before the Court are faring. Wherever possible the Court will include information on child-related outcomes. Some of this information can be produced from court records, while other information must come from CFSA. The Court is committed to working with CFSA to ensure that information within its control is included in the Court's performance measures.

Court Response to Challenges Outlined in GAO Report
(see Draft Report p. 14)

The Plan for Obtaining the Necessary Space and Facilities Carries a Number of Project Risks

As the report notes, the space and facilities plan carries a number of risks, which the Court has identified and is developing contingency plans to address. Given the extremely short time frame for full implementation of the Family Court Act, these risks are inevitable. The Court plans to mitigate these risks to the extent it is able by using experienced project managers to accommodate unanticipated problems related to technical, programmatic, and supportability risks.

However, the most significant programmatic risk for this project is the lack of timely funding, which has negatively impacted the project schedule. The Court's ability to meet the 18-month deadline is already in jeopardy. Although the Court is developing contingency options, such short-term solutions would increase the cost without likely meeting the long-term needs of the Family Court or conforming to the Courts' master plan.

Reducing Risks in Developing the New Information System Critical to Meeting Family Court Goals

As the report describes, the Court is working to ensure that both our requirements documents and our internal processes support the successful implementation of the Integrated Justice Information System (IJIS). These efforts demonstrate that the Court is committed to the sound planning and requirements work that will enable it to procure and implement an information system that meets the needs of the Family Court as well as other parts of the Superior Court. As part of the Family Court Transition Plan, the Court submitted an implementation plan for IJIS that builds quality into every stage of the implementation effort. In addition, program modifications to the existing systems will support the transition to IJIS and relieve any schedule pressures.

General points

1. Implementation
At several points the draft states that it is unclear who is responsible for implementation of an aspect of the Plan (see, e.g., top of page 10 regarding policies for handling cases). The Presiding Judge of the Family Court, in consultation with the Chief Judge of the Superior Court, is responsible for implementation of all aspects of the legislation. This includes compliance with all statutory mandates, from training curricula to case management.

2. Request for Additional Judges
The report notes (on p.11 of the draft) that "the chief judge of the Superior Court said that the court plans to submit its request in September 2002." As stated at the Senate Appropriations District of Columbia Subcommittee hearing on April 24, 2002, the Chief Judge anticipates submitting the letter

in the fall of 2002 in order to ensure that the Court has courtrooms and chambers for these judges once they have been nominated and appointed.

3. Baselines

The GAO report identifies a concern about the need to measure progress on performance outcomes for children and families served by the Court and the lack of baseline data from which to measure performance. While the Court has not yet completed development of baseline data for all components of the Family Court, we have developed baseline data in two critical areas identified in the Act.

To assess progress in case processing times in abuse and neglect cases as mandated by ASFA, the court will rely on two previously conducted studies: an initial assessment study undertaken as part of the federally-funded Court Improvement Project assessment and a study undertaken as part of the Court's Remedial Project. The Court Improvement Project provides information on case processing times prior to implementation of ASFA. The Court's Remedial Project examined case processing times in abuse and neglect cases for calendar year 2001 (post ASFA). Both studies, as well as timelines established in the District of Columbia ASFA, will serve as benchmarks against which current case processing times will be compared and progress will be measured.

Appendix II: GAO Contacts And Acknowledgments

GAO Contacts

Diana Pietrowiak, (202) 512-6239, pietrowiakd@gao.gov
Mark E. Ward, (202) 512-7274, wardm@gao.gov

Acknowledgments

The following individuals made important contributions to this report: Steven J. Berke, Richard Burkard, William Doherty, Nila Garces-Osorio, John C. Martin, Susan Ragland, James Rebbe, and Norma Samuel.

Related GAO Products

DC Family Court: Progress Made Toward Planned Transition, but Some Challenges Remain. Washington, D.C.: 2002.

DC Courts: Disciplined Processes Critical to Successful System Acquisition. Washington, D.C.: 2002.

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