

**Division of Social Services**  
**Presentation to the Joint Legislative Commission on Governmental Operations**  
**February 17, 2004**

Recently, North Carolina received a one-time TANF federal allocation totaling \$3,517,651 as a high performance bonus for success in the workforce accomplishments in Fiscal Year 2002. These bonus funds may be budgeted to support any allowable TANF expenditure and the State has two years to spend its award.

This bonus award comes to the State on behalf of the work performed by the 100 County Departments of Social Services in the administration of the Work First Program. Bonuses were awarded to states where employment goals for TANF adult recipients were met. North Carolina Counties are to be commended for successfully placing work first participants in jobs in a time where the economy was slow and NC was continuing to loose jobs. Counties also exceeded expectations in helping low-income families obtain food stamps, Medicaid, the State's Children's Health Insurance Program and child care in order to continue employment. North Carolina, through the work of its counties, also increased its proportion of children living in families with married parents.

The Division of Social Services proposes to use the bonus to support one TANF program as described below.

**CONTRACT WITH THE ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE OF THE COURTS - \$201,835**

In the Local Departments of Social Services throughout North Carolina, child welfare social workers are charged with making/ recommending critical decisions regarding the placement of children everyday. Currently, these decisions/recommendations are being made in the absence of having needed information that can help assure a safe placement for these children. In the past, agencies have relied on local law enforcement staff to provide state criminal records check information to agency staff. Law enforcement is only involved in about 20% of the cases investigated and thus, many placements are made without this information. The Department is proposing that the Division of Social Services contract with the Administrative Office of the Courts to give access to the county departments of social services. This contract will allow child welfare social workers in all 100 counties to have access to the information contained in the AOC database 24-hours/7 days a week. This information will enable workers to consider the criminal history of a person prior to deciding whether a person is a suitable placement for a child/ren. Criminal history information is one of many considerations given to the placement of children. Providing criminal records checks will also allow the county to more accurately assess the danger that a child or family may be in, based on the past criminal activities of an identified adult. This issue received much attention recently through the media's review of child fatalities that have occurred in our state. Both the Governor's Office and the House Committee on Abuse and Neglect, Foster Care and Adoptions has expressed on interest in finding a solution to this problem. Both have heard a presentation regarding this contract and how we hope to resolve the issue and were very supportive of the contract plan. This contract provides for the most cost effective way to gain access to this information. (See Attachment A)