

---

## Recommendations

**Recommendation 1. The General Assembly should direct DHHS to collaborate with a qualified organization to implement a statewide practice model and standardize child welfare business processes.**

As described in Finding 1, the State lacks a child welfare practice model and standardized child welfare business practices. This lack of commonality among counties contributes to variation in the delivery of child welfare services. DHHS should contract with a reputable and experienced organization that assists states in enhancing child welfare capacity to design and pilot a training model for county departments of social services. This training should operationalize the principles of the practice model and promote standardization of business processes. In addition, the training program should be designed so that it may be replicated by trainers in additional counties. DHHS should implement this recommendation by June 30, 2021.

**Recommendation 2. The General Assembly should direct DHHS to require any future training contractor to conduct culture change readiness training.**

As described in Finding 2, several factors hindered successful implementation of the NC FAST P4 module, including training provided to counties that workers viewed as possessing limited usefulness. Resource disparities between counties have also negatively affected the State's ability to consistently implement NC FAST P4. In order to promote effective and widespread use of P4, the General Assembly should direct DHHS to require the next NC FAST P4 training contractor to conduct culture change readiness training. Requiring the use of culture change readiness training is beneficial to both the State and counties because such training will enable counties to identify ways to efficiently use existing resources as they implement the NC FAST P4 module. Culture change readiness training can also assist counties in determining what, if any, additional resources may be required for successful implementation, such as technology (e.g., tablets) and staff (e.g., full-time equivalents). Resource assessments can be accompanied by the creation of tailored county-specific plans to enhance the provision of child welfare services. DHHS should implement this recommendation by December 31, 2021.

**Recommendation 3. If the General Assembly chooses to fund NC FAST in Fiscal Year 2020–21, it should direct DIT to embed staff within the NC FAST team to provide additional state oversight and reporting on P4 challenges.**

Finding 3 demonstrates the lack of coordination among groups that provide oversight for the NC FAST P4 project. Embedding a DIT staff member within the project will provide additional oversight to ensure

- adequate progress is made towards goals,
- additional reporting is provided to DIT and the General Assembly concerning NC FAST P4 progress,
- funding is used efficiently, and

- taxpayer investment in child welfare is protected.

The General Assembly should direct DHHS to complete this staff integration within one month of passing a budget for NC FAST.

**Recommendation 4. The General Assembly should direct DHHS to prioritize improvements in the usability of NC FAST in future vendor contracts.**

As described in Finding 5, current P4 usability is poor and could be improved either with the implementation of another case management system or the addition of a better end user interface for the existing system. The General Assembly should direct DHHS to prioritize usability in any future vendor contracts for P4 software. DHHS should report on implementation of this recommendation to the Joint Legislative Oversight Committee on Health and Human Services by December 31, 2020.

**Recommendation 5. The General Assembly should direct DHHS to require a free proof of concept for any additional software purchased to reduce unnecessary risk to the State.**

In conjunction with Recommendation 4, the General Assembly and DHHS should require vendors providing any additional software as a result of the pending request for information to provide a free proof of concept. Large contracts for information technology software or services contain risk for the State because they are costly. Some states have entered into agreements for child welfare case management software or user interfaces without proof that these solutions would work with existing technology.

A proof of concept is a demonstration to show or prove that software can work. The purpose is to test the technology, plug in real data, and use it as if it were performing actual day-to-day work. In this case, because NC FAST is so integrated and complex, vendors should be required to create a proof of concept that demonstrates their technology can successfully work in conjunction with NC FAST. DHHS should design a proof of concept with a set of use cases and features the department wants to validate; the vendor would then be required to demonstrate that those use cases and features are indeed valid. DHHS should implement this recommendation by December 31, 2021.