

Ltr-Tribune-2006-06-27.doc
Subject: Child Welfare

Citing an official OPPAGA (Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability) audit, the Tribune editorial "Bush Should Demand Better From Child Welfare System" (June 27), makes some very good points: that since the system went private, children are being more quickly reunited with their parents but they are suffering an increased incidence of abuse; that the state is spending 70 percent more than before privatization; that since private firms are not required to report administrative costs the public has no idea how its money is being spent.

An important point that you do not make is that in the late 1990s Governor Bush, Senator Ginny Brown-Waite and Representative Sandy Murman sold privatization of foster care to a public anxious to cut taxes and reduce the size of government by calling it "Community Based Care." They led us to believe they were decentralizing state government, giving more authority to local communities. They abolished the statewide health and human services board made up of citizens from district boards appointed by county commissioners, and supposedly replaced them with "a community alliance . . . in each county to provide a focal point for community participation and governance of community-based services (Florida Statutes 20.19[6]).

Governor Bush, totally ignoring the statutory language of "community participation and governance," has since run the entire child welfare system by contracts let from Tallahassee to "lead agencies" that are, in all cases but one, private "non-profit" corporations.

Florida Statutes order that community alliances shall be established "in each county to provide a focal point for community participation and governance of community-based services," but they are never mentioned in official audits, not in the one the Tribune cites nor in an earlier one entitled "Additional Improvements Are Needed as DCF Redesigns Its Lead Agency Oversight Systems" published in January. Community based care?

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