

harmed in the system that was created to protect them. And we have had cases and examples of delays in investigations that have been...brought injury to children unnecessarily. Obviously, it's very important that in any case where a child is being abused that allegation be investigated as quickly as possible, and if it is, in fact, occurring, we need to intervene as soon as possible and remove the child from further injury. Obviously, we have a Family Policy Act that Senator Scofield sponsored and we're hoping to reconcile families where possible, but there are also those families that simply are abusing their children and we ought not to allow that situation to continue. Currently, because of the lack of staff, we are having delays and investigations that are far too long. They are unconscionable. We wait too long when somebody has been identified as possibly being injured and we should know this about children, if a child is being hurt and we wait days, weeks and even months to investigate, the evidence may not be there, the ability to prosecute, to follow through, to take care of that child may not be there, and in the meantime as those hours and days and weeks and months pass, that child can be hurt and abused even further. We shouldn't stand for it. We should have the ability to have the workers across the State of Nebraska able to intervene and step in and stop abuse of children. I've passed out for you a summary of the cases of child abuse in this state. Over the past four years or so, we've had a range of between 7,500 and 8,000 cases investigated. Of those that were investigated, we had between four and 5,000 substantiated. Of course, that's whatever number too many cases, and hopefully we can do some things to intervene and stop the abuse before it ever happens, but certainly one of the things that we must recognize is that if there is abuse we must bring justice to those individuals and stop that practice from occurring any further. We are dealing with a range of six or 7,000 children being abused in this state every year. That's hard to even imagine that anybody anywhere could ever abuse a child, but especially in Nebraska where you recognize family values and a desire, I think, to support families and still to have this number of children abused is pretty unbelievable to even me, who has dealt with this for so many years. We also have in legal custody of the Department of Social Services, as I've passed out, on a monthly average, about 3,000 children that this state is trying to watch out for in our foster system. That's 3,000 children that we're trying to make sure are protected and safe outside of their home. This is, of course, a great concern to us and anytime we take custody of a child we have a