Child Welfare IT Managers' Webinar Series: Procurement and Contract Management

"Preparing to Say Goodbye to Your Vendor"

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Linda Holland, State of New Jersey
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Coordinator: Welcome and thank you for standing by. At this time all participants are in a listen-only mode until the question-and-answer portion of the conference. If you would like to ask a question at that time please press Star 1 on your touchtone phone and you'll be prompted to record your first and last name. today's conference is being recorded.

If you have any objection you may disconnect. Now I'll turn the call over to your host, Ms. Joyce Rose. Thank you, ma'am, you may begin.

Joyce Rose: Thank you. Welcome to the continuing procurement and contract management webinar series brought to you on behalf of the Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families, Children's Bureau, and presented by ICF International.

I'm Joyce Rose, your host and moderator for today's webinar, Preparing to Say Goodbye to Your Vendor.

Changes in funding availability and priority mean that opportunities for in-person discussions and networking among professionals working on agency child welfare IT systems are limited. As an alternative the Division of State

systems within the Children's Bureau is offering a series of webinars focusing on information sharing and discussion.

The content of the webinars is structured to appeal to a wide audience participating in an agency's child welfare initiative, including state and tribal welfare staff.

As I mentioned previously, today's webinar in the procurement and contract management series is entitled Preparing to Say Goodbye to Your Vendor, which I think you will find unique and interesting as our guest presenters have a wealth of experience in managing their state CWIS initiative as well as their implementation vendor or vendors.

We are very excited to bring to you a webinar on the topic of GIS and child welfare in June and then the previously postponed contract negotiation and management webinar will follow in July.

Now the topics for the August and September webinars are not quite determined so please keep an eye out for future announcements.

Attendees are encouraged to participate in our webinar with questions and comments. All of the participant lines are muted now but we will open them for the Q&A session at the end as well as after each presenter - presenters have concluded their comments.

Should we run out of time we will respond to your question via email and/or should you have additional questions you may submit those to me at the email address listed on the slide. Not only can you submit questions via your phones but you also can submit questions at any time using the GoToWebinar chat feature and those will be addressed as we receive them.

So we are extremely interested in knowing who is attending this webinar as it helps us to prepare content that is applicable to everyone. As I said, it is our intent through all the webinars to make the content attractive for everyone participating in an agency CWIS effort.

So we ask that you self-select one of the five categories listed and I'm going to ask my colleague Elizabeth to conduct the poll, please.

Elizabeth Mertinko: Yes, I have opened up the poll. If you all could please let us know which role you have and we'll just give you a minute or two to go ahead and click on the answers. It looks like we have about 70% of our audience that has voted so I'm going to leave it open just another couple seconds if you'd like to cast your vote.

And it looks like we have 38% state and child welfare information system project managers, 38% state child welfare information system program policy or technical staff, 13% tribal child welfare information program managers, and 13% ACF Children's Bureau personnel or ACF contractors.

Joyce Rose: That is an excellent representation, particularly because absolutely every discipline that is listed is affected whenever you are planning to have your vendor leave or get involved in transition planning. So that's a great representation.

So let us quickly review today's agenda and then we'll get on to the meat of the presentation. So we will have a brief introduction of presenters, we will do a review of our - of the context or establish the context. And then we'll have approximately 60 minutes of presentations from our guest presenters. And as always, the webinars will close with a Q&A session and also this time around

we’re going to entertain questions after each presenter has concluded. And then we’ll have a short wrap up.

So let us meet our presenters who I am very pleased to have onboard. Ann Hunt, Linda Holland, Deepak Gupta. Now, Ann is currently the Quality Assurance Project Manager for the Washington Children’s Administration Technology Services.

Ann has worked for technology services for the past 13 years. And in 2004 Washington actually began the project initiation phase for the current CWIS called FamLink. During the initiation phase Ann worked on the feasibility study, requirements definition, request for proposal, and vendor selection.

Through the two phases of the two-phase Family Implementation, Ann was the functional manager for the Family Financial Provider and Interface Function.

Linda Holland is the Director of Information Technology from the New Jersey Department of Children and Families. Linda has worked for the Department for close to 25 years starting out as a caseworker and moving through the ranks before landing in IT nine years ago.

Linda’s social work experience certainly allows her to bridge the gap between the world of IT and the Department’s business operations.

Deepak Gupta has worked for the New Jersey Department of Children and Families since 2009 and is the application maintenance and support manager. He is responsible for the system analysis, system testing, and user acceptance testing units. Deepak also works on special projects and is a member of the IT Management Team and holds a Bachelors in economics and computer science

from Rutgers and a Masters in Computer Science from George Mason University.

As I said, we are very pleased to have these experienced and qualified individuals as our guest presenters. And myself, formerly the project director the State of Wisconsin CWIS project. I retired in 2004 and have been involved with several ACF Children's Bureau sponsored training events since that time.

So let's now establish the context of our webinar. When we think about saying goodbye to our vendor we are actually talking about transition planning. Transition planning is the process for the migration of powers, duties, tasks, activities and functions from the responsibility of the implementation vendor to state ownership and management.

When we first begin our CWIS projects that can span anywhere from one to two to three years or more, transition planning is certainly far from our immediate concern and challenges.

But in actuality, transition planning should be thought of in conjunction with the project charter, the business requirements, reporting requirements, technical design documents, user support and training, and of course, federal documentation and expectations.

So bottom line, it is never ever too early to start thinking about and planning the transition of application responsibility with its many related tasks as the day you finally say goodbye to your vendor will come all too soon.

The challenges and risks are enormous simply because the complexity and size of a child welfare information system that seemingly and suddenly becomes yours.

Early attention to task identification and migration planning will ease those challenges and risks and ensure a smooth and transparent transition for both internal staff as well as the end user.

The tasks relating to the transition of a complex child welfare information system are numerous. This slide represents those tasks that our guest state presenters have identified and will be discussing as to how their state has planned for and managed the transition.

Ann Hunt will talk about Washington's approach to knowledge transfer and training. Linda Holland and Deepak Gupta will then discuss the New Jersey approach to handle and acceptance, change management, and end user support.

While our presenters have selected those tasks and functions there are many, many more that must be identified and addressed. Certainly property transition, security functions, service level agreements, and federal impacts and expectations must be considered and I'm sure you can think of many, many more that could be added to this list.

So let's now ask Ann Hunt from the State of Washington to talk about their model or their approach for knowledge transfer and training. Ann?

Ann Hunt: Okay, thanks, Joyce. I'm Ann Hunt and on my first slide I'm going to be talking about knowledge transfer. When we first began looking at this project and developing the RFP we identified that we wanted to find a way to prepare our staff to take over the maintenance of the system once the project was completed.

Therefore, we had what I think is sort of an unusual requirement in the RFP, which required the vendor to respond to how they would conduct knowledge transfer from their staff to our staff.

The RFP stated that the vendor would be responsible to assess our staff skills, their training needs, how to close those gaps, and the - and an approach to blended teams.

This specific part of the RFP was a key component that we were looking for in the project management section and had a great deal to do with our final vendor selection. We did actually have one vendor who said that they would not work in this manner and so we were unable to select them.

So to prepare the staff so they had the knowledge, skills, and ability to maintain and enhance the system in the future we had the blended team model where the teams all worked with their counterpart from the state and the vendor.

And this included even management positions and - what, development, testing, everywhere, you know, the whole system lifecycle and the management.

Additionally, the vendor proposed system documentation to allow staff and end users to fully understand the logic of the new system.

So when the vendor responded in their proposed solution one of the unique things that they responded with was a boot camp, which was meant to provide a detailed knowledge of the transfer system.

We worked with the vendor to identify the entire agenda of the boot camp so that we determined that not only would we be learning about the transfer system but we also wanted to show them our existing system so they understand where we're starting from, where we're coming from, and hopefully better understand our needs.

So one of the vendor's responses also was that early focus on the knowledge transfer is an excellent first step that will help create the needed super users. And they also responded that engaging all project team members in the effort to build one team began at the boot camp.

So on Page 13, as I said, the primary mechanism for knowledge transfer was the integrated project team. We also had additional methods though informal briefings so at times we held, what we call, the brown bag lunches and went over same key topics and training needed; hands-on participation in project activities.

As I said, we were partnered up all the way along the line and so we participated in everything in the system development lifecycle, again, including documentation and testing and all of that.

There were self-paced opportunities identified by the vendor that included things like textbooks to read, websites, other documentation, and then the vendors also recommended specific material.

And finally, we had some formal classroom and commercially available training for some of the staff, our development staff went to formal training and some of our task - test staff did also.

So on the next page, and I'm going to apologize, these slides might be kind of hard to read. They actually come out of the transition plan that was a deliverable from the vendor.

And if anybody's interested I have a knowledge transfer deliverable they created and the transfer deliverable. And if anybody would like either of those you can certainly send that request into Joyce and she can get it to me.

Anyway, so in the knowledge transfer transition plan the first step for the vendor was to define the organization, the roles and responsibilities, and skills within the organization.

Their next step, then they needed to assess the state technical staff skills. Then they had to measure the skill gap, close the skill gap via approved knowledge transfer options, and then create a technical training curriculum.

Okay, on Page 15 we have knowledge transfer and training, identify roles and responsibilities. So this, again, is not the greatest slide but I wanted to give you an idea of some of the content of the transfer deliverable. I think it could help anybody in setting up and figuring out how to transition from the vendor to the state staff.

So in this - in this table that the vendor created it identifies the team or type of staff, the roles that they would have, and their responsibilities and skills. And again, this is only one page of the document. There are many pages and I'm happy to share that document with you.

On Page 16, we had all our staff do a self-assessment, that is not pictured here, that is documented in the deliverable. But after they did that then the vendor assessed the gap in what skills would be needed. So the next slide shows that

they - the type of tasks, the skill gap, the knowledge transfer options that we would have, and the transition period.

I think - yes, I was still on 16. I'm sorry. So should we go back - 16. It keeps going forward. There we go. All right. So that's 15, that was, again, identifying the skill gaps and then 16 was closing the identified skill gaps. So then you had the team or person, the skill gap identified, prerequisite skill identified as yes or no, knowledge transfer options, and then notes about that.

And so then on 17 we have what was the turnover schedule. So again, the application team lead and persons were identified in the second column. The skill gaps listed, knowledge transfer options listed, but this time we have the transfer period for that work to be - for that gap to be closed.

And so then on Slide 18, let's talk about how this actually works. So the state staff did work side by side participating in all the activities. The functional team participated in design sessions in creating the documentation and review of the functional documentation for signoff.

The vendor did create the functional documentation, which we called topic papers and they're very in depth documents as to the functional - the areas of family.

And then the development team did formal technical training and joint code and documentation review. So - and by the end of the project they also were doing the coding by themselves. And the test team, they participated in design sessions. They did side by side test scripts with the vendor. And then there was formal training for the test manager to manage test after the vendor was to leave.

On Slide 19, where are we now? Things didn't quite go as planned because - mostly because of the economy. So we had 100% of resources planned and the economy then only allowed us to have 60% of those.

Therefore, we have retained our vendor, they're still onboard right now. Initially when they were retained they were assigned specific work by contract amendment. So a functional change would be requested and it would be assigned to them to work it from beginning to end. Our state resources did still work with them on that but they had the lead.

About a year ago we did another amendment for our vendor to be supplemental staff and so today the state has the lead, the activities, but the vendor supplements as needed.

And finally, their contract is scheduled to end in May 2015 and so we're just starting to turn the vendor role around a little bit so that they move to more of a quality assurance to validate that our staff are able to conduct the activities. And so they're more in a reviewer role.

And finally, we have started rolling off slowly but surely and will roll off through 5/15 when it ends.

And the last slide for me is about our contracted training. So training for family has always been the state staff, not a vendor, until a couple months ago. We contracted with the University of Washington Alliance to deliver the training.

So it's called UW Alliance and they have taken over all of the training for our staff. They deliver a core training to new workers, that includes things like

basic (FamLink), our comprehensive family evaluation, our court reports, our service referral to providers, initial assessments, and child well being.

And then ongoing training is also delivered by them upon request. So if we're rolling out a new function we will talk to the UW Alliance about it and they will do that training.

And with that, that concludes my piece of the presentation and we were going to go ahead and ask if anyone had questions at this point.

Joyce Rose: Yes, Ann, thank you so very much and I actually am going to kick off some of the questions because as you were talking some things popped into my head. The first one is about super users.

You talked about how they were - how the boot camp created the super users or facilitated creating super users. Were they - did you select and bring in those folks, the super users or potential super users from around the state?

Ann Hunt: Yes, we did, and they became - some of them were temporary project team members and many of them have become permanent project team members and they all participated in that boot camp.

Joyce Rose: And then another question I had is actually how long was the boot camp? And did it vary according to specific functions?

Ann Hunt: There was a general boot camp for all roles and it was a couple weeks if I remember correctly. And then they also had a technical boot camp. And I do not know how long that was, I didn't participate in it.

Joyce Rose: Thank you. And then my final question is about the skill gap process that you showed and I noted that some of the skill requirements or some of the knowledge requirements were pretty steep. So my question is did you find that your internal staff met those skill requirements or did you have to hire new state folks to fill those rolls?

Ann Hunt: We did not hire new state folks. We closed the gap with the project team members. We have since, of course, supplemented our staff once we had the funds available to make up for that 40% that we anticipated and didn't get at the conclusion of the project. But the project team members continued on with the vendor as staff. Did that answer your question?

Joyce Rose: Yes, it does. And hopefully that has planted some seeds for some more questions from our attendees. So Elizabeth, how do we do this now?

Elizabeth Mertinko: If you have question please press Star 1 to line up on the phone and the Operator will open up the line for you. Again, Star 1 if you've got questions. And in the meantime while we're waiting for people to line up I have another question that's come in.

Even though you have knowledge transfer in the RFP and in the work plan, how do you make time for your staff to actually do it? And how do you hold the vendor staff to it, particularly when they're crashing on tasks at the end of the project?

Ann Hunt: Well, actually that brings up a really good point and I meant to speak about it but I didn't put it in my notes, that is one of the issues of this whole process was the vendor staff will work long hours and generally the state staff were not able to work those same hours with them.

So sometimes there was work done where the vendor actually kind of gained on the state staff and we were behind the eight ball. And in many ways, we are still making up for some of that knowledge that we didn't gather because we weren't available at the time.

And the most poignant example of that was batch documentation, our requirements of the vendor in the contract didn't include that they had to document those batches to almost a level of pseudo code and therefore the batch documentation came up short. This - doing the batches was a lot of the work the vendor did in those late hours.

So we found that we had some difficulties with understanding everything the complicated batches did. So we were - even at this time, still going back to better document those so our subsequent people after us never have to do that again. But there is a concern with hours that people are available to work.

Joyce Rose: And that - this is Joyce. And that is a good lesson for people to hear, make sure that your documentation for these complicated processes are understandable and clear for when you have to take over the maintenance process.

Ann Hunt: Right, really important.

Elizabeth Mertinko: All right, Operator, do we have anyone on the line with questions?

Coordinator: no one has queued up. Again, it is Star 1, unmute your phone and record your name. You'll be announced in the conference.

Joyce Rose: While we're giving our attendees a couple more minutes to potentially submit some questions, I would like to ask Linda and Deepak if they have anything

unique in their state regarding knowledge transfer and training that they would like to share at this point in time. Linda, Deepak?

Linda Holland: So we had many of the same struggles - this is Linda, that certainly Washington is experience in regards to, you know, you can lay out the best plan but if financially your state, you know, resource wise can't provide that you're going to fall short.

We experienced some of that but one of the points that I'd like to make is that when we did transfer our system we transferred to - the development piece of the application to our state NJ, what we call NJ OIT, Office of Information Technology. And so the developers came to - here with us, not at NJ OIT but here onsite with us, which worked out very well.

They became - quickly became part of the team and made us a very cohesive team. One of the things though that I caution is when you get your staff from another state department, right, that has this overarching umbrella in the IT section, you know, the staff that they sent us were not on par with the staff that the vendor sent.

So we did struggle in the beginning with the initial staff that they sent us. So my recommendation would be is to - you know, foster that relationship and don't be afraid to send somebody back, right.

So we made the bold move of basically someone who wasn't performing, we had them sent back, which sent a tremendous message to the other staff that were here.

Additionally, I'll add that we got some phenomenal people from OIT as we moved forward because, you know, as the economy kind of tanked we lucked

out and probably got some folks coming in the door when we hired additional developers that we probably normally wouldn't have gotten.

And you know, there's three or four of those people that really are remarkable that we - just are fantastic. They are better in many respects to some of the vendor staff that we have.

And because they came in, you know, from the outside and missed - not quite all of the transition period, they were here while the vendor was still on site but not for the full 18 months that our initial transition was planned for, they were very, very vested in the process to begin with and excited and happy to be here.

And so - I'm not going to say all of them but most of them, right, three out of four of them, five out of six of them, caught up very quickly and are very valuable members of our team now.

So you know, I'm going to add that Deepak started as one of those developers that came in from the outside and really was a star from the very start, which will explain why he's advanced very quickly here in state government.

But he may be able - I'm going to let him speak for a minute on what his perception was because I think he can add a unique - not to put him on the spot because I don't know that he prepared for this but I think he can give us a unique perspective on what it's like walk in, you know, to state government, probably not having experienced how we do things just a little bit different from the private sector, and how it felt to walk in with the vendor walking out the door.

And then probably - you know, I'm going to say, a lot of pressure being put on him and the other developers to perform at that level or - and not even at that level but to exceed it. Because we were being pushed to continue to make changes to the system. So Deepak?

Deepak Gupta: Yes, so you know, basically Ann and Linda pretty much stated the same things that I was feeling. I think the development staff, the team that you want to put together, needs to be solid and it can't just be down to, you know, state staff, the lowest pay grades trying to get them to take on this new technology and everything and doing all the development.

So in some ways I think DCFS did luck out that they did get some folks from outside who weren't state employees and were able - you know, knew the technology and everything, were easily able to transition and take the lead on some of the specific things, which kind of helped the folks that were already here and working on the projects because they were able to guide them somewhat and get them up to speed.

So I think the first six to eight months I think the development team struggled but I think came up to speed pretty fast.

I do want to make one suggestion, if you're trying to - I know Ann mentioned about batch coding and everything, same here at DCF. I feel it is somewhat poorly documented and it is a big piece of this project. So I suggest that you have additional developers rather than just relaying on one person to do the entire piece of work. So keep that in mind.

Joyce Rose: Excellent point, excellent points. Any questions? Did we - do we have any questions from our attendees?

Coordinator: There are none, thank you.

Deepak Gupta: I do have one question for Ann. I noticed that you have a testing team. Do you - are you in process of automated testing or are you still manually doing testing?

Ann Hunt: we're still manually doing testing and talking about automating the regression testing.

Deepak Gupta: All right, thank you.

Joyce Rose: And Deepak, that begs the question, are you doing automated or manual testing?

Deepak Gupta: Currently we're not, we're looking into it.

Joyce Rose: Okay, all right, thank you. All right, Ann, I want to thank you very much, excellent information, and again, if our attendees have any questions or would like any information from Ann you can email me at - and you'll get the email shortly as we get to the wrap up.

She offered a couple artifacts in case you would like to look at those. I think it was the knowledge transfer and training plan, was that correct, Ann?

Ann Hunt: Knowledge transfer and transition plan.

Joyce Rose: Okay, there you go. So there's two documents you may be interested in looking at in your own environment. So with that, let us move on to the New Jersey model regarding transition planning and you're going to talk about

handover acceptance, change management, and end user supports. So Ann and Deepak, take it away.

Linda Holland: Okay, so this is Linda. I think that Ann and Deepak and myself have already mentioned this but it bears repeating. Documentation is key to the success of a state taking over, right.

We have - I'm going to share some lessons learned that we have and that I think were some big misses and some suggestions for how it might have been better moving forward.

You know, New Jersey was very anxious which is probably the case in most states to get rid of a vendor, right, because I think there's certain state people that think, you know, if you get rid of the vendor you're going to save money, right.

And so there was that overarching even though we had an 18-month transition plan to let's take this over, right. There was this sense that if it was all state staff managing this that, you know, incidents or enhancements would be done faster, that we can control how they're done.

We had issues certainly with our vendor, which I'm sure all of you have experienced, the dreaded change request, right.

And so I think there was just an overall sense that the state wanted out.

One of the recommendations that I make in regards to documentation is that - you know, we're handed all the design documents and as we transition we worked in these documents but nobody reviewed the documents to ensure that they were complete.

So just looking at the document or doing a brief kind of cursory look it looks good. But when you go to try to make a change in the system after your vendor's gone you may find that something's missing or that people thought or inferred that people just knew what that meant, right, that things - that there are gaps in that design document.

So my recommendation would be to take the time to do an actual joint review of that design document while your vendor is still here, right. make sure that those documents are complete and up to date and that you have modules for all the functionality.

Here's a big miss on New Jersey's part. We transitioned part of the security of the application months - months before we started to transition some of the development. We took over the security piece.

Well, we never realized that there wasn't a security manual or modular so after the vendor left when we went back because we wanted to revamp some of the user groups or other pieces it's like, well, where's the stuff on security? There wasn't one.

And so we've taken a lot of time now with the current security team to start to make sure that we have all of that information documented and it's not, like, okay, well, it's in so-and-so's head or they know how it works, right. We've really struggled - you know, we're fortunate because security is very important, obviously. It's the forefront of many people's minds that nobody be able to get into your system.

So we know - I don't have any doubt that we're secure but what I want to make a change or add a piece of functionality to another user group that took

my team a long time and it was a challenge for them to understand how security had been set up, right.

So we're at a point now where we understand it. We're working on making sure it's properly documented but in the midst of all that we have to continue to move forward. And so it's a challenge on their time to be able to do all that, right, because you don't get more resources to do it. You have to work within the confines of what you have.

And so it's really important that you take the time to review all the documents. It's very easy to take the easy way out and say, okay, well, we've been doing that, yes, we know, we know. We had a couple different exercises going back to try to enhance the design documents to make sure that they're up to date and yet periodically we still find a gap in the - as we move forward. So again, I just can't stress that enough.

When you move to your - I'm going to say a brief thing on system administration, DBA functionality, this is something else that we don't really feel was documented properly. Also, you know, when the state hasted to get rid of the vendor as Ann pointed, you know, you do your gap analysis and did you get new people to fill this gap or I think that was Joyce's question.

No, you have to make due with what you have so to speak and people transition their roles and they transition their knowledge base accordingly. And so we didn't have a true DBA when we transitioned. You know, and having a good architect if you will onboard is very important, right.

So we've gone back. We were able to - you know, we have somebody who does that function now or works on it but it was very difficult, again, to play catch up.

Another thing that I could recommend that you try to do as you transition and we attempted this. We were successful with one of the employees but not with many of them. So what we tried to do was as the vendor transitioned off they had several vendor staff if you will that lived locally in the area and didn't want to get assigned to other projects in other states.

And so they didn't want to move. So we certainly worked with legal here, we certainly worked with our vendor agency to see if any of those folks wanted to stay onboard and become state staff, right, that we were successful in one case. In many cases it came down obviously to money, right, and we couldn't meet the salary requirements.

But it is worth the effort because - like I said, you know, we had attempted to get three people that we knew were willing to stay. We got one out of three so that's really not bad and the one we got was probably the best out of the three. So we were able to work that out.

So I recommend investing a little bit of time, you know, again, this is - you have to work with your legal department. Certainly the vendor would have to be willing to give the folks up depending on what their contractual obligations are there. But it is definitely worth the conversation to see if any of them want to stay.

As you close out your contract, again, it's important to pay attention to those deliverables. We were somewhat hasty when they left and the - you know, administration at that time felt that the deliverables were met. In hindsight, I might not necessarily 100% agree on them but it's not something, you know, that you get to go back and revisit at another time.

So again, it just goes back to what we've all keep - you know, kind of saying on this call, documentation is really, really important, okay. So I recommend that you take the extra time that you need to make sure that you have those documents.

Change management, again, it comes down here a little bit to documentation as well. What we did here in New Jersey or what we struggled with is our vendor had two separate databases, one for incidents and one for what the - change requests, right.

So we combined the two. What we didn't do was have a joint review and cleanup before they left. So in the beginning probably when you rolled out your (unintelligible) system hundreds of incidents, certainly here in New Jersey, got entered.

We didn't take that time to look at all those incidents before the vendor left and see which ones could be closed, see which ones didn't have complete information. We have developers, we have system analysts from the vendor side of the house that enter things that we have struggled to interrupt, what does this mean, right.

Now it may be because it's several years later and it's no longer an issue, we weren't sure. So my recommendation would be to take that time to review incident tracking or database in which they're tracking incidents, see what you think can be closed so you can start with a much smaller part - pot.

We had several hundred that we've had to whittle through and close over the years. So it's important to do a review and a clean up before that, okay. Make sure that what's there does have documentation so you're going to understand what it is.

Additionally, we had to transition because these databases were on the vendor hardware. So that can pose another issue, certainly not only do you have to transition it from the hardware, you have to make sure that whatever software they're using to track that, that you have the same version.

You can end up with version controls. It's just - you know, the point here is just to remember to think about this, right. It's important that you don't lose the work that's already been done by the vendor, right. So we did struggle a little bit with that.

The change request, again, adding that into the incident tracker, combining those two was difficult, finding common ground and finding ways to note which was an enhancement if you will, a much nicer term than change request, right. And then of course, tracking of those incidents.

We have found there to be many duplicate incidents noted in the system. So again, if you can take the time on the front end, which is what I recommend or you're going to be paying the price, you know, at the back end just saying, well, what's this, where does this go, is - didn't we just fix something like this, this sounds like that.

We had a couple that appeared where we made - you know, we enhanced the system to correct, you know, a bug if you will and had we seen the other incident we could have fixed something that kind of went along with it hand in hand. So we had a couple missed opportunities there, right.

The other thing that you really should take time to do is to document the life cycle of an incident or an enhancement. It took us a long time - and I'm going

to turn this over to Deepak in a second as we advance to the next slide where he can review how we do things here in New Jersey.

But this is really important for a couple different reasons. We were working and certainly we thought ever - well, everybody understands the process, right, everybody knows how it works. And we found that that's not always necessarily true.

So it's important to take that time and have it documented how does something become an incident or an enhancement? What's the approval process? Who decides when it goes in and what release it goes in, et cetera? So I'm going to move it over to this slide, which hopefully you guys can see but I'll let Deepak explain further as we get into it.

Deepak Gupta: All right, so yes, this is a pretty busy diagram here but it has a lot of business in it so I wanted to kind of keep everything on it so you can understand it. So initially basically you're looking at the top left-hand corner on the purple is when an incident is created.

And when an incident is created whoever creates it basically needs to answer a few questions for the management team so they can better decide what release this incident should go into.

So when you open an incident they need to look at, you know, how did this - how was this problem discovered? You know, does it impact multiple users, you know - percentage of users having this issue? Does it impact payment and claiming? So try to gather as much of the information while you're creating the incident initially.

So once the incident's created the next thing that happens is we try to get a level of effort from the development team as well as from the analysts to kind of see how much time it will take us to work on this incident. And based on that we - the management team meets quarterly to decide what release this incident would go in.

Now there are some incidents that need to be done immediately and they're part of the emergency releases. So those are created pretty much the same way but we act on them rather quickly.

Okay, so basically the first (unintelligible) is basically deciding what release an incident will go into and an incident to us is either a bug fix or an enhancement or something the state mandated, federal mandated. So anything to us is an incident.

Okay, so once that incident is assigned to a release it's assigned to an analyst to look at.

And for example, currently we're working on Release 5.3 for development but we're doing analysis on Release 5.4 so they would start their analysis and based on their analysis, if they deem that this incident is working as designed and they don't want to make additional changes to it they can close the incident or they can complete - you know, make the modification to the design - system design documents and get it right for development.

So during each phases here as you move the incident from one state to another an email gets triggered to the appropriate person. So when a release is assigned - an incident is assigned to releases and an analyst is selected, an analyst gets an email stating that, you know, they need to act on it at a certain time point.

When an incident is moved by analyst to development team an email is sent to the developer and they're aware of it, the incident is waiting for them to develop. That completes the first two basically.

Once a developer is in the orange - is ready to work on it, he'll move it to in progress, work on it, get additional information from the analyst if they need to complete this incident, and then move it to unit testing. Now unit testing in our environment is done by the development team as well. So they're responsible for coding the incident as well as unit testing.

Once they're done with it they hand it back to the tester. Now we tried a couple of different approaches here, you know, trying to pick a different tester than the analyst but we were running into some issues because certain things weren't getting documented properly.

So we decided to basically - the system tester would be the analyst himself or herself so the incident goes back to that person again who did the analysis for it to make sure that what they requested is part of this incident.

The last - well, the second to last swim lane is basically if they find any issues with the incident it can either be documented the new incident or failed and corrected by the development team.

So if it's corrected by the development team it basically goes into the middle swim lane and follows the same process all over again. However, if it's either past the system test and ready for (UAT) or it's passed in some ways but failed in other ways and it can be documented then the incident would create a new incident for it and move it down to the (UAT) team.

Now user acceptance testing most of the time is done by somebody other than the system analyst or the developer. We usually bring in users throughout the state to our office here centrally and they come in and test the particular incident.

If there - if they accept an incident and it's designed the way they wanted it then they go ahead and resolve the incident and that pretty much completes the cycle of incident tracker.

The key here really is that - you know, the process is defined properly and when the incidents get moved from one state to another email gets triggered so people are aware of what the state of the incident is and when they need to act on it.

It also keeps the management team in check as far as how the release is going, we can keep track of how many incidents have - are still in development and how many are resolved.

So if you have any questions regarding this thing I'm willing to take some questions right now or we can wait until later.

Elizabeth Mertinko: Anyone have any question please press Star 1 to line up for questions.

Coordinator: At this time we have no one in queue. We'll give them a moment to join the queue.

Joyce Rose: Yes, this is Joyce. And I just want to comment here that, yes, we are acknowledging that this is a busy slide. But we think that the content and the process is absolutely excellent information. And I believe that all attendees to

the webinar have been provided the PowerPoint so you can certainly print off or enlarge this slide for your own purposes.

Elizabeth Mertinko: Joyce, we sent the slides to everybody who had registered as of about 11:30 this morning. We also will post the slides and a recording of this presentation to the Children's Bureau's website and that information will be available at the end of this show.

So there are a couple different ways to get the information. And of course, folks can always email at the address that you'll provide to ask for a larger version of this if they needed it.

Joyce Rose: Absolutely, thanks, Elizabeth.

Coordinator: We've still had no one queue up for this section.

Joyce Rose: Okay, Linda, Deepak, let's move on now, okay?

Linda Holland: Okay, it's Linda again. So I want to take a couple minutes to talk about helpdesk and end user support. Here in New Jersey we transitioned our helpdesk prior to transitioning the development piece of the maintenance. And we made several things - you know, we did several things we could do better, let's just put it that way.

Again, due to resources our helpdesk was originally staffed by folks that were transitioning out of positions that were no longer needed in the IT shop. And I'm going to share one example, we had a gentleman who's job it was to pack up reports in a box and, you know, basically label them and send them out to our local offices.

That was his job. And he ended up on the helpdesk. We had several clerical staff that ended up on the helpdesk. In the beginning these folks were really just placed there and told them - told that this was their new job.

So shortly after that it fell under my responsibility at the time in a different role here and we made some very swift changes to help support the staff that were on the helpdesk but to also make sure that they were properly trained.

One of the first things that we did was we did start to generate different reports, which was very helpful so that we could modify how the helpdesk ran. We looked at the number of calls, the times that the calls came in, how long the calls lasted, the topics of the calls, et cetera. This was very important, you know, and we met weekly to discuss that.

In order to get staff up to speed, however, we made sure that all helpdesk staff took the same training that the field staff took. So they took all of the different modules.

They took intake, they took permanency, they took fiscal, whatever - legal, they completed all of the courses. Unfortunately it would have been better if they had completed it all before they were put on the phones but that’s not how it worked, right.

We also sent them all to customer service training. This I think was key too so that they understood their role, you know, that not specifically the model that the customer is always right but it certainly gave them the understanding of how or gave them some things that they could do when they had an irate, you know, customer if you will or a worker on the phone that was totally frustrated, right. We gave them the tools to be able to work with that client on the phone.

So training is very, very important. We had how-to guides made available for staff. We made them available for the helpdesk staff. We had cheat sheets. We have a knowledge web, right.

Back to the gentleman that used to pack boxes, so a couple months in one day I was walking back to the helpdesk and this gentleman was on the phone with a how do I guide up walking through it step by step with someone on the phone.

And so I spoke with him after to find out, you know, how he felt that process went because in the beginning he was learning just like the staff was learning. He is now one of my top call takers and probably one of the most requested males that I have on the phone.

So he took the time to do that, fortunately for us he didn't get frustrated with his new role because like I said, it really wasn't that he volunteered to go there or say, I want to work on the helpdesk. It's something that he was just, you know, put in the position to do.

He has done an incredible job and while I don't think he's going to become, you know, one of the higher tiers on my helpdesk I do believe that he is transitioned very well into that position.

So my recommendation is if you're going to transition your help desk from a vendor supported helpdesk that you start - you know, when you have your staff trained before and then if you can have them, you know, sit side by side for a period of time and do a smoother transfer.

So we used - you know, I'll just go back and say, you know, the helpdesk was pretty much called the helpless desk. We got - you know, it took us months and that was - that goes back to even when the vendor supported it, it started with them.

So I will point the finger at them a little bit but when we took it over we didn't do much better, right. We kind of followed their lead in that.

Now we over 7,000 plus users. We receive calls everyday. I think it's about 500 a week if I remember correctly. They are usually more than - 70% are answered with that first level and it doesn't have to advance beyond that. We now have three levels really of our helpdesk.

Our Tier 1 is mostly call takers. I have two staff that I consider to be Tier 3 and those are quite honestly system analyst. Those are staff that could very easily transition in to that - you know, move up to that next level.

And they do a lot of the troubleshooting before something has to go to an analyst. While we still have these weekly reports that we look at things have really - if you will, balanced out and we no longer are looking at them, you know, to scrutinize how can we make this, you know, better or more efficient.

We strive to answer every call with that first call and not require a call back or not require getting a Tier 2 person on the phone but they are available there to answer the call. They're available to troubleshoot.

We have expended our helpdesk not only to take calls on the application but they now handle some hardware support questions as well. We have upgraded our ticketing system. We have trained staff on that as well so, again, it's all

about training and having documentation available to them to support them to do their job better, right.

So if you have the time and you can hopefully train them in advance before you kind of throw them to the wolves if you will by putting them on a phone, that's great. I would strongly recommend that you invest the money in customer service training.

They all found that to be very helpful, put their role in perspective. It decreased the level of frustration for them sometimes when they couldn't answer the question.

One of the things that I did as well when this first fell under me was I looked at some of the super users that we had out in the local offices and I saw which ones of them might be interested in coming here to sit on the helpdesk when their roles in the local offices were dwindling down.

So I was fortunate to steal several of them and that was very, very helpful. And I think once, you know, staff started to get more confident we started to get them the training that they should have had upfront, that they are all very comfortable now and we have a very well functioning helpdesk.

We put out a monthly newsletter that staff a heads up on new enhancements or changes to the system that they're coming. It's included when they come out, if there's any new instructions, et cetera. It's included in that as well.

We post them - you know, on the knowledge web if there needs to be a cheat sheet. We're a little - you know, now that we're probably in our seventh year here, there's a little less of that than there was in the past. But we do receive good feedback on our monthly newsletters.

Folks like to know what's coming, they like to know when it's out, they've seen some changes as well where folks have made recommendations now when they call the helpdesk. Can we change this? Now while we don't want all our end users - or they don't have the authority to make changes, there certainly have been some good things that came out of that, right.

Folks have pointed out that the way that the history displays on a sheet's maybe not as user friendly as it could be. We've worked on changing that. Someone reported once that they kept running out of space when they were typing in a particular document, we were able to enhance the field on that.

So it feels really good when you get to a point that you feel that what the end users really want you're able to support, right. It gets tricky though, sometimes they want us to change the case (unintelligible) or something like that, it's a little bit more difficult to tackle that but we do raise the - anything that comes through the helpdesk, we will raise the operations certainly for their consideration, right.

Ongoing support for the end users, we have a training academy that now trains everybody as they come in to the state. They offer ongoing training as well for staff that feels they may need additional training or if they transition, say, from intake to permanency, they do offer trainings there that staff can go on to their website and register for.

One key here that we struggled with was the training environment that they used was initially housed with the vendor and so there was in transition to move that over on to our side, which was done. One of the things that we struggle with though was keeping that environment up to date with the - with the production environment.

And so when we make enhancements obviously in production we need to be mindful that the training environment needs to be updated. It's difficult because they're doing training so whenever we're ready they're not ready, when they're ready we're not ready. We've run into that a couple times.

Primarily here in New Jersey we put the onus on the training academy if you will to have their environment updated as they're ready. We let them know when releases go out but we put that onus on them. They're responsible for keeping all of their scenarios, et cetera up to date. We don't participate in that.

One of the things we did is we had folks from the training academy involved in the project from the very beginning and that was the understanding - would be that they would be maintaining that database so that is - stayed in sync.

So you know, it does fall out of sync. We have had some issues with that. But that's just an ongoing communication issue that we work to try to improve everyday.

So in regards to end user and training end user and support, you know, like I said, we try to keep them up to date on all the changes. There's been real - you know, some real positive feedback when they know in advance and they're not surprised if you will.

Operations has always come on board as well. They have a - did you know series that they put out as well and they are also letting users know in advance now when they plan bigger changes.

So if they, for example, were going to change the risk assessment, they will try to let staff know that there is a plan change in that. Then we will let them

know, you know, once it's in queue and it's being worked on, when we anticipate those changes to go out in the application, and then we find that it works a little bit smoother, right.

We in the past here from an IT perspective will make changes to the application. You know, we're certainly under the impression that operations had notified staff and it wasn't going to be a surprise all of sudden that something in the past that wasn't required was now going to be required.

So we try to be mindful to put that in and we try to be mindful that operations has notified staff so it doesn't come as a surprise.

And I think that wraps it up for me. If anybody has any questions, Deepak and I will do our best to answer them.

Joyce Rose: Linda and Deepak, thank you so very, very much. A lot of information in a short amount of time and while we're getting the phone lines opened up and checking to see if anyone has submitted a question in the chat feature a comment that I have is - regarding the helpdesk is I think it's the most underappreciated and undervalued staff - a project team.

And when you think that they are the face of and the window into the world of end user support, which drives the subsequent acceptance of the application and the critical, critical staff. And I really, really appreciate the detail that you went into regarding transitioning of your helpdesk.

So let me ask a question to get this kicked off, one of your challenges - one of your transition challenges was moving a - probably databases, et cetera from vendor hardware to state hardware.

Can you talk a bit about the parallel testing period and if there was any conflict between the state and vendor regarding difference in performance levels? Any issues and then how they were resolved?

Linda Holland: So I - you know, Joyce, that's a good question. Fortunately we really didn't have any challenges in regards to performance. I think the challenges were on the - before we even got to performance in that, you know, they might have been on a different version of the software so that the hardware piece was relatively easy, right, find - they had it stored on such and such a box.

We were okay with procuring - you know, again, you go through the procurement process. I think a couple of things for us really were a surprise. It was like, we didn't think when they were leaving that incident tracker, you know - we forgot it was on their hardware.

So it was really for us the 11th hour saying, well, where are we going to put that. And so fortunately our - you know, network team was quick to free up space in an area where we could put it and then the challenge really was wait, what software version are you running that on?

Well, the state doesn't own that version or we haven't upgraded to that version yet. And so we have to very hastily and quickly do that. I think that everybody rallied from both sides of the house - you know, from the vendor side and the state side to make it work.

Maybe because we really weren't given a choice or there was a short time frame but it really - my point was just to say, guys, you got to think about this because we missed it, we totally missed that.

Performance wise, I have to say, you know, we've upgraded it a couple different times since that. We're actually looking to move it into another application all together at this point.

And we've had, you know - I have to say, it's been pretty positive at this point. It's more of an understanding of what they had in there that you really should look at before they're out the door.

So it's more content related than actually getting the - moving the hardware and getting the software to run.

Joyce Rose: Great, great. Inventory. So questions, Elizabeth?

Elizabeth Mertinko: Yes, if we could have folks press Star 1 if you have questions and the Operator will unmute your line. Again, that's Star 1 for the Operator to unmute your line.

Coordinator: And we do have one waiting.

Elizabeth Mertinko: Okay, let's go ahead and start with that then.

Coordinator: Okay, it sounds a little bit like part of the name is cut off. Go ahead, your line is open.

Dana: Thank you. This is Dana from Alaska. And my question was already answered; it was about the ratio of helpdesk employees to end users.

Linda Holland: So we have ten helpdesk - full time helpdesk staff and we have about 7,000 users.

Dana: Okay, thanks.

Linda Holland: In the beginning we certainly could have used probably triple the number of folks on the call but right now we seem to do well with the staff of ten.

Dana: Okay, thanks.

Coordinator: And there are no other questions right now.

Elizabeth Mertinko: Okay, again, Star 1 to line up for questions. While we're talking helpdesk I do - I have one that came in.

And I think you've talked about this a little bit either for Ann or Linda and Deepak, while co-staffing development teams or helpdesks are preparing strategies to help the state build capacity to take over (unintelligible) of the system, what were some of the downsides in your experience?

Linda Holland: You know, for New Jersey the real downside is that we didn't train or folks didn't feel the need to train the helpdesk staff up front. They - many of the helpdesk staff in the beginning learned along with our end users, which is a real disservice, right. They should have been - the helpdesk staff should have been identified beforehand.

When the vendor managed the helpdesk I have to be honest it was even worse than when we took it over. It was a mess because, you know, they were using analysts here and there and everywhere. They were scattered all of the office. There wasn't good communication.

When we first took the helpdesk over - I believe that was true. When it fell under one of my purviews one of the first things we did was put them all in

the same area. They all have low walls. They're in individual cubes but they have low walls so they can stand up or they can, you know, quickly rush over to one another's aid, which they do now.

You know, they - not that they don't hear what's going on, you know, or you don't try to keep the - you know, the noise level down I guess if you will. We really haven't found that to be an issue. And they're very helpful.

They're - you know, they all sit in the same area with the - like, I said, with the low wall. It's like, you know, two rows down, five on each side, and it's just has worked out great.

So the only thing I can say downside wise was that they weren't - in my opinion, properly trained on the application before they were put in the position to have to answer questions about it, you know. And I think that that was just a real, you know, disservice and so I applaud my - the helpdesk staff that we have.

While we've had very little turnover. In the beginning, you know, we lost a couple people but that was for different reasons. I think we were - I don't want to say glad that they left but it worked out to our advantage that they left. The other staff have stayed. It's - you know, primarily been very steady there, you know.

Recently we had somebody retired. We're going to - we're actually promoting somebody into their title and going to be looking, you know, to fill that at a lower level now. But they are - they stuck with it and their reputation has grown in leaps and bounds.

And I think they're very proud of it. I think that they feel very accomplished at the end of every day when they can really help folks.

As a matter of fact, I will add that, you know, one of the things that we're seeing now is that the helpdesk gets asked questions really more program questions, right.

Do I have to do a visit on an interstate child if - blah, blah, blah, blah? So we really have to reign our staff in and say, no, those aren't the kind of questions that we should be asking. If they need to know how to document that visit in the system or how to document that one wasn't required we can certainly walk them through the steps of that.

But we try to stay away from the other end of the questions. And we're seeing, you know, more and more of those questions, you know, come in than we have in the past. So I think that staff out in the field are really starting to respect the helpdesk if you will.

But it - you know, it has taken us many years to get there. So you're not going to get there quickly. It's a process. And it's a process, you know, once people have stopped calling because they really felt they weren't being helped to get them to start calling again.

So it just takes - it takes time and it takes, you know, getting the folks trained. So if you have the opportunity, again, you know, invest the time and the effort upfront.

Joyce Rose: Linda, this is Joyce. And I'm assuming that when your helpdesk gets a policy related question that you have a process in place to refer them to or forward them to an expert?

Linda Holland: Yes, ma'am.

Joyce Rose: Okay, great. More questions?

Elizabeth Mertinko: Okay, Operator, do we have anyone on the line?

Coordinator: We do not, thank you.

Elizabeth Mertinko: So I have another question that's come in. And Ann, I know you talked about this at the beginning of the presentation but I don't know if you have more to add or Linda and Deepak, if you want to jump in.

One of the handover risks is keeping technical documentation up to date, especially with all of the last minute bug fixes that come out of testing or pilot. What did you do to monitor this or to make sure that it happened?

Ann Hunt: In Washington our documentation is mostly focused on functional and when we even do an incident fix or, you know, whatever if it's not a change request but an incident it's still - we still ensure that that - what we call the topic paper, which describes the function, is updated. I would guess that our technical documentation is not appropriately updated.

Linda Holland: Yes, we certainly here in New Jersey have struggled with keeping that up to date but we have - we now peer review each of the enhancements and incidents to make sure that it gets done.

While I'd love to say as the director that it's absolutely 100% done every single time we're all human, people make mistakes, things are rushed to get things out, but that's what we try to do to avoid that. We have somebody else

peer review it and kind of signoff that everything - you know, all the different elements or steps if you will have been done.

And so I think that's probably kind of - if you have a checklist, you know, that goes with each incident, enhancement, change request, whatever you call it in your state, that's helpful too that you can check off, you know, this was done, this was done, this was done.

So that's - we've tried to incorporate it into the process but, you know, again, as busy as we are I would say that, you know, like most states we struggle with that.

Elizabeth Mertinko: And one additional question, what is the best time to begin planning for post vendor staffing needs, like, numbers and skill sets?

And in your experience, were there pros and cons to training and transitioning existing state staff maybe those supporting legacy apps to maintain the application versus hiring new staff with the necessary modern skill sets?

Ann Hunt: Once you begin that planning right off the bat and that's had a lot to do with the transition planning. We were intent on bringing our current staff - increasing their skills so they could maintain the system. And we did a pretty good job of that.

Since then I said we did hire off the street but for the most part the current staff that existed prior to the project are still here.

Linda Holland: So in New Jersey I would say it's a mixed bag. We have some legacy staff that didn't feel that they were properly included if you will in the development of the new system, that was their opinion.

They were resistant throughout the process and there might even still be a couple out there that are a little resistant to this day.

It would be nice to get rid of them. Now it would be nice if there were a smoother transition in that area. I think for the most part folks have embraced the system - the new system, and we have had few problems in that area.

Again, it's difficult if they don't have the skill set so a proper assessment is very important in that if staff don't have the skill set then, yes, I would recommend you go out and try to procure the appropriate resources, right.

We were fortunate - I mentioned the gentleman for - you know, for the helpdesk. You know, I don't know I had been in the position of putting staff on there that I would have said, yes, we'll give this guy a shot. But he certainly has more than proved himself in that area.

We had another gentleman, I think, who had expressed - he did hardware support or something of that nature and he expressed interest in batches and somebody suddenly gave him the job of doing batches. And honestly it was a nightmare, I'm not really sure how that happened.

We did find something - you know, other work for him to do that he is now certainly doing it - an excellent job at. So I think you have to build on people's strengths but I also think, you know, don't be afraid if something's not working out to make a change.

It really depends on your ability to hire staff and what - you know, what the finances are in your state and what your procedures are for hiring outside if you will, right. I mentioned that we had a couple of staff that came from the

NJ OIT and, again, one of them clearly was not working out and didn't have the skill level that we thought they needed.

And so while it wasn't easy we sent him back. We basically said, we cannot use this individual here. So you know, if you can get - I think it depends on your staff.

You have to set them each individually and, you know, don't be afraid to make a change though because it's - you know, you'll - you should know early on if it's going to work out and if they have the skills to transition. If they don't I would cut your losses and move as quickly as you can away from that.

Joyce Rose: And this is Joyce, I just want add another thought in that some of these things are generational. You may have staff who have for years done nothing but - support specific old technology.

Their generation does not want to move to new things. So when you do staff assessment and skills assessment take a look at that also.

Elizabeth Mertinko: Excellent point, thanks. Operator, do we have anyone queued up for questions.

Coordinator: We do not have anyone right now. And again, it is Star 1, unmute your phone, and record your name.

Elizabeth Mertinko: Okay, Joyce, if you maybe want to do your concluding comments and we'll make one more check for questions right at the very end but we are right at 3:30.

Joyce Rose: Absolutely, thank you, (Elizabeth). So it is in conclusion, golly, today we have learned how two states, Washington and New Jersey, have approached transition planning for key functions and have prepared their state and their staff to assume both the ownership and management of their specific CWIS applications.

We hope all of you who have attended this webinar have found the information to be both informative and valuable as you yourself move forward with your initiatives. If you have any questions or would like more information please do not hesitate to contact me at the email listed above, Joyce@Kassets.com

And again, this webinar has been recorded and will be made available online. When it is complete and posted we will send a message via the (unintelligible) manager's listserv with the link.

I again want to thank our excellent state presenters. It's not - I understand how busy you all are and to take time to help us with these webinars and provide information to share with your colleagues is just superb. So I want to thank all of you for attending and please watch for information for the next Children's Bureau sponsored webinar event. And with that, good day. Thank you.

Elizabeth Mertinko: Okay, thank you all very much.

Coordinator: This does conclude today's conference call. Thank you for your participation and all parties may disconnect at this time.

END