

this is an analysis of mediation and contract dispute resolution. And I thought Senator Chambers made a very strong point on General File about caseworkers and the power given to caseworkers. Now you just don't have the routine plug in the numbers, answer the questions, out spews the benefits and that's it. Now we're talking about a partnership, in a sense, between the state and the recipient, between the caseworker representing the state and the recipient to identify what the assets are, what the needs are for that individual and how we can best address their concerns and enhance their assets. And this is...this is a partnership that should be positive but, in some cases, there are caseworkers, obviously, that have a negative view and could be, in fact, turned into a punitive result. And we recognize that. We are aware of that and share that concern. So we have asked the Department of Social Services to look at how they might set up a mediation contract dispute resolution. And if Senator Landis was here, I would ask him to talk a bit about how mediation can probably work its way to resolving a lot of these conflicts through the Department of Social Services. He's worked a lot on that in other areas. But we think that this is a very good idea that will help a lot in terms of I thought the concerns that Senator Chambers made very well on General File about abusive power given to caseworkers that could be misused. So we're talking about a dispute resolution, media, mediation option. Also, we're talking here about an independent appeal process. There is already an appeal process, you have to have it, but currently it's integral into the department. We're suggesting trying to separate it out so there's less of a feeling that you're just going back to the same people that just told you no, to ask them to consider saying yes. That will help the recipient, I think, have a more fair playing field, a level playing field. One of the thoughts I had when we talked about this whole concept was you sign a self-sufficiency contract, but what if the recipient says no? What if the state says, we think you should have 9 months, the recipient says, I need 12 months, and the recipient doesn't give in. They feel strongly about it. The state doesn't give in. They feel strongly about it. Well, you do have an appeal process but is it a...is it really fair and independent? And I think that question is an appropriate one. So we are trying to say, look, we're talking about a two-way street here on a contract that maybe we do need an independent individual or process to look at this and help resolve disputes. This is a very important change in the bill and one that I think makes a big difference in a positive way to how all of us should feel about the implementation of