1	IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
2	FOR THE NORTHERN DISTRICT OF OKLAHOMA
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4	D.G., by Next Friend G. Gail) Stricklin, et al., for themselves)
5	and those similarly situated,)
6	Plaintiffs,)
7	V.) No. 08-cv-074-GKF-FHM
8	C. BRAD HENRY, in his official) capacity as Governor of the)
9	State of Oklahoma, et al.,
10	Defendants.)
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12	REPORTER'S TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS
13	HAD ON MAY 5, 2009
14	MOTION HEARING - AN EXCERPT
15	
16	BEFORE THE HONORABLE GREGORY K. FRIZZELL, Judge
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18	APPEARANCES:
19	For the Plaintiffs: Mr. Paul DeMuro
20	Frederic Dorwart Lawyers 124 East Fourth Street
21	Tulsa, Oklahoma 74103 Ms. Marcia Lowry
22	Mr. Andrew B. Bauer Mr. Jeremiah Frei-Pearson
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1	(APPEARANCES CONTINUED)
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14	PROCEEDINGS
15	May 5, 2009
16	THE COURT: Be seated please. Before the Court is
17	plaintiffs' Motion For Class Certification found at document
18	number 4 in the Court's docket. The Court having reviewed the
19	pleadings of the parties and having heard argument of counsel
20	finds as follows:
21	The named plaintiffs in this case are eight children
22	in foster care in Oklahoma. They have sued the nine members of
23	the Oklahoma Commission for Human Services - the body
24	responsible for formulating the policies and adopting the rules
25	and regulations for the administration of the Oklahoma

Department of Human Services - and the director of DHS himself in their official capacities. Plaintiffs allege policies and practices of DHS regarding the state's foster care program violate their 14th Amendment right to substantive due process, their Fifth and Fourteenth Amendment rights to procedural due process, and liberty and privacy interests protected by the First, Ninth and Fourteenth Amendments.

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Plaintiffs seeks certification of the following class:
All children who are or will be in the legal custody

of the Oklahoma Department of Human Services, number one, due to a report or suspicion of abuse or neglect, or two, who are or will be adjudicated deprived due to abuse or neglect.

Plaintiffs in their Statement of Relief Sought found at document number 241 seek seven remedies summarized as follows:

Number one, caseloads: Limits on the caseloads of all case carrying workers and supervisors based on standards for accreditation of public child welfare agencies set by the Council on Accreditation, the COA, and professional standards set by the Child Welfare League of America, the CWLA. The CWLA standards call for a caseload size for family foster care social workers of between 12 to 15 children per worker, and for supervisors to supervise no more than five social workers. The COA recommends that caseloads generally not exceed 18 children or eight children with special therapeutic needs.

Number two, education and training: The imposition of

educational qualifications requirements for caseworkers and supervisors and implementation of comprehensive pre-service and in-service training programs for caseworkers, supervisors, foster parents and adoptive parents based on standards for training established by the COA and CWLA.

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Number three, availability of necessary resources for placement of children: An assessment by qualified professionals. to determine, number one, the need for additional placements to provide the necessary range of placement options for children in the custody of DHS; number two, the time period during which these placements will be developed; and number three, the steps necessary to develop these placements.

Number four, monitoring the safety of children in placement: Implementation of mandatory schedules for DHS workers to visit all children in placement and their foster parents, in accordance with COA standards. Mandatory compliance with regulations of the Oklahoma Administrative Code, the OAC, for investigating complaints of abuse and neglect of children in placement, and mandatory compliance with OAC standards and processes for the approval, screening, oversight and utilization of all placement types that house foster children.

Number five, outcomes for children: An order requiring DHS shall meet the outcome measures set by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the DHHS, including,

for example, DHHS measures aimed at protecting foster children from abuse and neglect, ensuring permanency and stability in their living situations and preserving the continuity of family relationships and connections.

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Number six, quality assurance data: An order requiring DHS to ensure that it has a quality assurance system consistent with the standards of the COA and CWLA that is capable of measuring the quality of treatment and services provided to children in DHS custody.

And finally, number seven, monitoring and enforcement:

Plaintiffs seek Court appointment of a neutral monitor to

monitor the provisions of any Court order entered pursuant to

Rule 65(d)

Now under Rule 23 of the Federal Rules of Civil

Procedure the Court may certify a class if the purported class
meets four requirements set out in subsection (a) of the rule
and also meets the requirement of one of the types of classes
described in subsection (b) of the rule. The requirements of
Rule 23(a) are numerosity, commonalty of questions of fact or
law between the named plaintiffs and the class, typicality of
named plaintiffs' claims and defenses to those of the class,
and adequacy of the named plaintiffs and their attorneys as
class representatives. The particular type of class plaintiffs
seek to certify is set forth in Rule 23(b)(2), that is,
plaintiffs assert that defendants have acted or refused to act

on grounds that apply generally to the class so that final injunctive relief or corresponding declaratory relief is appropriate respecting the class as a whole.

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Plaintiffs, as the parties seeking certification, bear a strict burden of proving all the requirements of Rule 23(a) have been met. Rex v. Owens ex rel, Oklahoma 585 F.2d 432 at 435, Tenth Circuit 1978.

The Court, in its analysis, must accept the substantive allegations of complaint as true. Shook vs. El Paso County, 386 F.3d 963 at page 968, Tenth Circuit 2004.

Whether a case should be allowed to proceed as a class action involves intensely practical considerations, most of which are purely factual or fact intensive. Reed vs. Brown, 849 F.2d 1307 at 1309, Tenth Circuit 1988.

Each case must be decided on its own facts on the basis of practicalities and prudential considerations. Reed vs. Brown again.

The class determination generally involves considerations that are enmeshed in the factual and legal issues comprising the plaintiffs' cause of action. General Telephone Company of the Southwest vs. Falcon, 457 U.S. at 147 at page 160, 1982.

Therefore, while the Court is not to decide the case on its merits, it should make whatever factual and legal inquiries are necessary under Rule 23. Castano vs. American

Tobacco Company, 84 F.3d 734 at 744, Fifth Circuit 1996, and Sazbo, S-A-Z-B-O vs. Bridgeport Machines, Inc., 249 F.3d, 672 at page 676, Seventh Circuit, 2001.

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Further to the point, the Court stresses that its decision today is in no way to be construed as a decision on the merits. In keeping with the law cited above the Court has made factual inquiries only to the extent necessary to comply with the Rule 23 requirements for class certification. A decision on the merits of plaintiffs' claims lies somewhere down the road after discovery, motion practice and trial are complete.

The Court makes the following findings regarding the elements of 23(a):

Numerosity: Plaintiffs allege the class of children in foster care due to abuse or neglect numbers in excess of 10,000. Defendants do not dispute the size of the class meets the numerosity requirement. The Court finds, therefore, that the numerosity element set forth in Rule 23(a)(1) is satisfied.

Commonality: Plaintiffs have asserted that there are nine questions of fact and five questions of law common to all of the children in the class. A finding of commonalty requires only a single issue of fact or law common to the class. J.B. vs. Valdez, 186 F.3d 1280 at page 1288, Tenth Circuit, 1999. However, mere allegations of systemic failures of an agency such as DHS will not suffice. J.B. vs. Valdez at pages 1288

and 1289. The Tenth Circuit will not allow plaintiffs, quote "to broadly conflate a variety of claims to establish commonalty via an allegation of systemic failures." End quote. Also J.B. vs. Valdez at the same pages.

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The class that plaintiffs seek to represent is quite diverse. It's members range in age from infants to teenagers. The reasons they end up in the foster care system vary widely. Their placements range from emergency shelters to institutions, to group homes, to placement with relatives, to placement with unrelated foster care providers. Their needs vary widely. Their lengths of stay in the foster care system are similarly diverse. The ultimate outcome goals for these children vary. Reunification with their birth families is the goal for some while adoption is the goal for others. Their physical, educational, and emotional needs are divergent. Many are Native American children and thus special laws apply to them. Some have been adjudicated not only as deprived, but as juvenile delinquents.

Suffice it to say, as a result of the diversity of the group, many of the questions of fact and law plaintiffs allege to be common do not appear to be, in fact, common. A clear example of this is the question of whether DHS has a policy or practice of failing to arrange for and facilitate plaintiffs' family relationships causing significant harm and risk of harm to plaintiffs' health and well-being. Clearly, this is not

that fact issue common to all children in foster care because the goal for many children is to terminate parental rights of the biological family and place these children for adoption. Similarly, the question whether DHS has a policy or practice of subjecting plaintiffs to unreasonably frequent moves from placement to placement causing significant harm and risk of harm to plaintiffs' health and well-being is not common to all children because many, perhaps the majority, of children in foster care are not subjected to frequent moves.

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However, the court finds at least one common issue of fact: Whether DHS has a policy or practice of failing to adequately monitor the safety of plaintiff children causing significant harm and risk of harm to plaintiff children's safety, health and well-being.

With respect to the adequate monitoring of foster children's safety, the Court finds, based on evidence submitted by the parties, that this is a fact issue common to all children in the proposed class. The Court is not making any finding that these children are all subjected to harm as a result of DHS's monitoring practices. The Court is simply finding that the issue of whether the monitoring practices compromise the safety of foster children is an issue common to the entire proposed class.

Additionally, it appears to the Court that this common factual issue also raises at least one common legal issue,

specifically whether the alleged policies or practices violate plaintiffs' right to be reasonably free from harm and imminent risk of harm while in state custody. See Yvonne L. vs. New
Mexico Department of Human Services, 959 F.2d 883 at page 892 to 893.

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Therefore, the Court finds the commonalty element set forth in Rule 23(a)(2) has been met.

Typicality: Rule 23(a)(3) requires the claims of the named plaintiffs to be typical of the claims of the class.

Obviously, issues of commonalty and typicality are closely related, and as with the commonalty requirement, differing fact situations of class members do not defeat typicality under Rule 23(a)(3) so long as the claims of the class representatives and class members are based on the same legal or remedial theory.

Adamson vs. Bowen, 855 F.2d 668 at 676, Tenth Circuit 1988.

In a civil rights action such as this one typicality does not require that the interest and the claims of the named plaintiffs and the class members to be identical. Anderson vs. City of Albuquerque, 690 F.2d 796 at page 800, Tenth Circuit, 1982.

As long as the class representatives' claims are not significantly antagonistic to a class, typicality is established.

In re: Williams Companies ERISA Litigation, Northern District of Oklahoma 2005.

While each named plaintiff and each potential class

member has his or her own unique background, story and problems, the Court finds that the interests of the named plaintiffs and the class member are not significantly antagonistic.

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Therefore, the typicality requirement of Rule 23(a)(3) is satisfied.

Rule 23(b)(2) and Rule 65(d): Plaintiffs seek class certification under Rule 23(b)(2), asserting that DHS has acted or refused to act on grounds that apply generally to the class, so that final injunctive relief or corresponding declaratory relief is appropriate respecting the class as a whole. Rule 23(b), in turn, implicates Rule 65(d) which provides that every order granting an injunction must state the reasons why it issued, state its terms specifically, and describe in reasonable detail, and not by referring to the complaint or other documents, the act or acts to be restrained or required. The tension between Rule 23(b)(2) and Rule 65(d) was examined at length by the Tenth Circuit in the Tenth Circuit's recent Shook II decision found at Shook vs. Board of County

Commissioner of County of El Paso, 543 F. 3d 597, Tenth Circuit, 2008.

The Tenth Circuit stated in <u>Shook II</u> that Rule 23(b)(2) imposes two separate but related requirements: First, the defendants' actions or inactions must be based on grounds generally applicable to all class members. Second, the final

injunctive relief must be appropriate for the class as a whole. The Tenth Circuit said that quote, "put differently, Rule 23(b)(2) demands a certain cohesiveness amongst class members with respect no their injuries, the absence of which can preclude certification." End quote. Found at page 604. The court described the cohesiveness as follows: First, the class must be sufficiently cohesive that any class-wide injunctive relief can satisfy the limitations of Rule 65(d), namely the requirement that it state its terms specifically and describe in reasonable detail the act or acts restrained or required. Second, a class action may not be certified under Rule 23(b)(2) if relief specifically tailored to each class member would be necessary to correct the allegedly wrongful conduct of each defendant.

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The court's ruling in <u>Shook II</u> cautions that individual issues cannot be avoided simply by formulating an injunction at a stratospheric level of abstraction, and injunctions simply requiring defendants to obey the law are too vague to satisfy Rule 65. The bottom line is that, at the class certification stage where we are now, the injunctive relief sought must be described in reasonably particular detail such that the Court can at least conceive of an injunction that would satisfy the requirements of both Rule 65(d) and Rule 23(b)(2). <u>Shook II</u> at pages 605 and 606.

Defendants argue that none of plaintiffs' proposed

remedies meet the requirements of Rule 23(b)(2) and Rule 65(d) because they are too vague, unmanageable and/or inappropriate. The Court agrees with defendants at least with respect to many of the proposed remedies. Without ruling definitively the Court can state that this Court is disinclined to enter an injunction generally requiring DHS to obey Oklahoma statutes and regulations because such an order would run afoul of Rule 65 and the Tenth Circuit's directives. The Court will also be reluctant to order any type of relief incapable of description in a sufficiently objective way that both the defendant and the Court can determine whether the defendant is complying.

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However, at least one remedy requested by plaintiffs appears to pass the test set out in Shook II. Plaintiffs seek an injunction setting limits on the caseloads of caseworkers and their supervisors. While the Court does not necessarily accept the propositions that the caseloads should be based on standards set by the COA and the CWLA, as proposed by plaintiffs, the injunctive relief is set forth in enough concrete manageable detail that the Court can at least conceive of an injunction that would satisfy the requirements of both Rule 23(b)(2) and Rule 65(d). Plaintiffs assert in this lawsuit that excessive caseloads are harming or putting at risk of harm all children in the class. Imposition of caseload limits would apply to the entire class. Thus, Rule 23(b)(2)'s cohesiveness requirement is met. The Rule 65(d) requirement is

also met because an injunction setting caseload limits would provide sufficient specificity and detail to escape the vagueness prohibition.

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In this vein, the Court would like to address an argument raised by defendants in their briefing and in argument today. Defendants take the position that plaintiffs must show actual injury in order to seek injunctive relief and that a determination must be made that each and every plaintiff in the class must show actual injury before they are entitled to an injunction. In support of these propositions defendants cite the Vallario vs. Vandehey decision at 545 F.3d 1259, at page 1268 note 7, Tenth Circuit 2009, and Tandy vs. City of Wichita, 380 F.3d 1288 at page 1283, Tenth Circuit 2004. The defendants are mistaken in two respects. First, under Tandy, in order to establish standing named plaintiffs must show an injury in fact that is actual or imminent. However, in Tandy the court said that if plaintiffs seek prospective relief as opposed to retrospective relief, the plaintiffs must show they are suffering a continuing injury or be under a real and immediate threat of being injured in the future. Further, the court held in Tandy that quote, "Past wrongs are evidence bearing on whether there is a real and immediate threat of repeated injury." End quote. Found at 380 F.3d at 1283. Moreover, while named plaintiffs must show standing in order to proceed, neither Vallario nor Tandy stand for the proposition that each

and every class member must go through the same process at this point in this case, that is, in order to meet the requirements for class certification.

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Applying this test, six of the remaining eight plaintiffs C.S., J.B. A.P., J.P., R.J., and G.C. allege physical abuse, sexual abuse, and/or injury due to unsafe conditions while in custody of DHS. The remaining two plaintiffs, J.A. and K.T., do not actually allege physical injury due to abuse or neglect in DHS custody, although I believe in Ms. Lowry's argument today she asserted that K.T. has in fact been subject to physical abuse. J.A., a 5-year old boy, alleges that during the one year he had been in custody before this suit was filed he had been shuffled through nine different placements including institutional facilities, which has led to a lack of adequate stability, treatment or care. K.T., a 16 year old girl, alleges she has suffered from developmental delays from being housed in inappropriate, unsafe and poorly monitored emergency shelters and group homes.

The Court concludes that the allegations of the remaining named plaintiffs satisfy the requirement regarding injury in fact and imminent risk of injury and, therefore, the Court must reject defendants' standing argument.

The question remains, given the Court's determination as to allegation of shuffled placement doesn't meet the commonalty requirement, whether J.A. should remain a member of

the class, but I'll leave that to you to suggest how to proceed. And of course we're proceeding with discovery so I don't know that it precludes discovery on the issue, but that remains an issue to be wrestled with.

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Examining the remedies proposed by plaintiffs, it is clear that at least the caseload limit remedy meets the requirements of Rule 23(b)(2) and Rule 65(d), that is, it applies to the proposed class in a cohesive manner which would not require the Court to look at each class member individually, and at the same time it is specific and detailed enough that it escapes the vagueness defect. In this case, in contrast to the facts presented in Shook II, plaintiffs have given content to what it would mean to provided adequate caseload staffing. Thus, for purposes of today's hearing, plaintiffs have satisfied Rule 65(d) by showing that caseload limits are ultimately capable of description in a sufficiently objective way that both the defendants and the Court can determine if the defendants are complying.

Similarly, while this Court would be disinclined to order DHS to quote, "obey the law," end quote, regarding visitation and monitoring of foster children by caseworkers, the Court can conceive of an injunction regarding visitation and monitoring, if warranted by the evidence in a trial on the merits, that would meet the cohesiveness mandate of Rule 23(b)(2) and still be specific enough to satisfy Rule 65(d).

The Court is less convinced that the remaining requests for relief meet the requirements of Rule 23 and Rule 65. However, the Court makes no conclusive rulings about remedies today other than that with respect to plaintiffs' class certification motion, the remedy dealing with caseload limits and the remedy dealing with monitoring of children in foster care, appear to meet the requirements of these two rules. Therefore, this Court concludes that certification of the class requested by plaintiffs is appropriate.

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For these reasons, plaintiffs' motion to certify, document number 4, is granted and the Court hereby certifies under Rule 23 the following class:

All children who are or will be in the legal custody of the Oklahoma Department of Human Services (1) due to a report or suspicion of abuse or neglect, or (2) who are or will be adjudicated deprived due to abuse or neglect.

Counsel, if you-all would approach.

(Off-the-record sidebar conference out of hearing of open court and the court reporter.)

THE COURT: Ms. Lowry, with regard to exhibits?

MS. LOWRY: Yes. Your Honor, I neglected to ask the

Court to receive the dispositives that I used during the

argument and so I would ask that they be made a part of the

record.

THE COURT: Very well. And how are those marked?

They are numbered 1 through 11. 1 MS. LOWRY: THE COURT: Very well. Any objection? 2 3 MR. NANCE: No, Your Honor. 4 THE COURT: Very well, Plaintiff's 1 through 11 are admitted. 5 In addition, the Court needs to make the following 7 conclusion with regard to Rule 23(a)(4), and I apologize for reading the order, but it's necessary to satisfy the legal 9 requirements that are set forth by the Tenth Circuit, and 10 there's one additional matter that the Court needs to touch 11 upon. Rule 23(a)(4) requires a two-part inquiry. Number one, 12 do the named plaintiffs and their counsel have any conflicts of 13 interest with other class members; and number two, will the 14 named plaintiffs and their counsel prosecute the action 15 vigorously on behalf of the class? See Rutter & Wilbanks 16 Corporation vs. Shell Oil Company, 314 F.3d 1180, at pages 1187 17 to 1188, Tenth Circuit, 2002. In this case there appears to be 18 no dispute regarding those two matters regarding counsel, as to conflict of interest or their ability to prosecute the action 19 20 vigorously. Is there anything further? 2.1 MS. LOWRY: Not from plaintiffs, Your Honor. 22 THE COURT: Mr. Nance. 2.3 MR. NANCE: No, Your Honor. You are entering a 24 written order in keeping with what you said or is this the 25 ruling?

1	THE COURT: Well, this would be the ruling. The
2	question may arise whether or not we ought to simply rewrite
3	what I just read. You can certainly get it from Glen here.
4	Basically it would not differ whatsoever from what I just read,
5	so I think it's been adequately set forth on the record. There
6	may be some debate about that but
7	MR. NANCE: Thank you, Your Honor. And nothing
8	further from us.
9	THE COURT: Very well. If there's nothing further
10	we'll be adjourned.
11	(Recess.)
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13	A TRUE AND CORRECT TRANSCRIPT.
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15	CERTIFIED: s/ Glen R. Dorrough Glen R. Dorrough
16	United States Court Reporter
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