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**COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES
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TO: Supervisor Hilda L. Solis, Chair
Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas
Supervisor Sheila Kuehl
Supervisor Don Knabe
Supervisor Michael D. Antonovich

FROM: John Naimo 
Auditor-Controller

SUBJECT: **CHILDREN'S GROUP HOME OMBUDSMAN SEMI-ANNUAL REPORT --
JULY 1 THROUGH DECEMBER 31, 2015**

This memorandum is to provide you with information about the Auditor-Controller's Children's Group Home Ombudsman (Ombudsman) Program for the period of July 1 through December 31, 2015.

Background

The Ombudsman serves as an advocate for children placed in group homes (GH) by the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS), and provides a confidential and informal process to resolve issues raised by children residing in GHs. The Ombudsman responds to requests for assistance (requests), which are generally received through a toll-free hotline, e-mail, and during periodic site visits. The Ombudsman hotline number and e-mail address are included on posters which are required to be displayed in every County-contracted GH. In addition, Ombudsman staff conduct routine site visits encouraging children to call the hotline if they need assistance in resolving GH problems.

Upon receiving a request, the Ombudsman interviews the requester to understand the situation and to determine an appropriate response and/or course of action. The Ombudsman may also contact other parties, including DCFS personnel, GH providers, or others as needed to gather additional information, and also to facilitate a reasonable solution that is within the children's rights and established regulations.

Summary of Requests for Assistance

During this six-month reporting period, we received a total of 120 requests, consisting of 99 hotline calls and 21 direct requests during site visits. For comparison, the Ombudsman hotline received 112 requests and 139 requests in each of the prior two six-month reporting periods, respectively. Attachment I details the types of requests received by the Ombudsman. Overall, 96 (80%) of the 120 requests (7 physical safety, 28 personal rights, and 61 "other") were resolved within the Ombudsman's purview. Attachment II identifies the GHs involved with the 96 requests. The remaining 24 requests involved individuals seeking general information (14 requests pertaining to GHs and 10 requests that were non-GH related). In such cases, the Ombudsman provided an answer or directed the requester to the appropriate party.

Assistance requests are categorized based on the initial allegation(s) as described by the youth/caller. Requests indicating a possible threat to the physical safety or well-being of the youth are prioritized and immediately referred to the Child Protection Hotline, the Department of Mental Health's (DMH) 24-Hour Access Hotline, local law enforcement, or another appropriate agency for investigation, depending on the nature of the allegations. The Ombudsman's goal is to be accessible and to assist all callers, and accordingly all requests for assistance are presumed to be factual until proven otherwise through follow-up.

To ensure that requests were properly addressed and resolved, we completed various communications and referrals to DCFS Children's Social Workers (CSWs), the Child Protection Hotline, Out-of-Home Care Management Division, Contract Monitoring Division, Public Inquiry Unit, and DCFS' Youth Development Ombudsman. In addition, the Ombudsman frequently communicated and coordinated with the Probation Department (Probation) Ombudsman, Probation GH Monitoring and Investigations Unit, State Community Care Licensing, GH staff/management, and occasionally other counties to ensure the requester's issues were fully addressed, and that proper agencies were notified. The requests identified in this report concerning sexual abuse and self-harm were referred to, and followed-up on by, DCFS and DMH staff, respectively.

We noted that one GH accounted for 16% of the total requests during this period, many of which were received during two outreach visits we conducted jointly with the Probation Ombudsman. The requests were all resolved through follow-up with CSWs, Probation Officers, and the GH Program Director. We also reviewed the results of Probation's recently completed contract compliance monitoring review of this GH, and noted that Probation did not identify any significant findings. We will conduct additional outreach to youth placed in this and other GHs with higher volumes of requests, to ensure that the concerns of placed children are addressed.

The following are examples of requests received and resolved within the purview of the Ombudsman during this reporting period:

- During an outreach visit, a youth asked whether he would receive money for his recent high school graduation, since he heard from the Independent Living Program Coordinator that he would. We contacted his CSW who indicated that the youth was entitled to receive \$700 for graduation and that the check had already been issued. However, the youth indicated that he never received his check. After working with his CSW and the Independent Living Program Coordinator, a new check was issued and the youth confirmed that he received the \$700.
- A youth called and reported that he had been waiting for his aunt and uncle to be Live Scanned so he could transition from the GH to live with them. However, the process had not yet occurred and he was feeling frustrated. He stated his aunt and uncle do not live in Los Angeles County, and that his aunt does not drive and has limited availability to be Live Scanned because she operates a daycare. The Ombudsman contacted DCFS staff to assist with either arranging transportation for the aunt and uncle to a Live Scan location or scheduling a mobile Live Scan service to go to their home. The Ombudsman also put this staff in contact with the youth's CSW to make the necessary arrangements. Within approximately one week of the youth's call, a mobile Live Scan was arranged to visit the aunt and uncle's home. The Ombudsman followed-up with the youth, who reported that the Live Scan process was successfully completed.

Outreach

One of the Ombudsman's responsibilities is to visit GHs, and provide DCFS children and GH staff with information about the Ombudsman function. GH audit and monitoring reports are reviewed, and visits are prioritized and scheduled based on concerns reported by residents, information from recent reports, and/or concerns raised by the Sybil Brand Commission, Commission for Children and Families, and DCFS Special Audit Committee. In addition, requests received from GH residents may trigger additional announced and/or unannounced visits.

During this reporting period, the Ombudsman conducted outreach to 44 GH sites (operated by 25 agencies). Two GH sites were visited twice and five of the 44 GH visits were conducted with the Probation Ombudsman because some GHs have both DCFS and Probation-placed youth. The joint outreach visits increase awareness and clarity about the resources available to GH residents. Included in our visits during this reporting period were 12 non-contracted GHs, which DCFS management explained were used for hard to place youth or when other placement options have been exhausted.

In total, including non-contracted GHs and visits with the Probation Ombudsman, we met with 152 children, gave verbal presentations, and provided them with brochures.

During these visits, GH residents also had the opportunity to ask questions and request assistance if needed. Attachment III identifies the GH site visits completed during this reporting period.

Conclusion

We will continue to conduct visits to contracted and non-contracted GHs during the next reporting period, and coordinate with the Probation Ombudsman where GHs have both DCFS and Probation-placed youth. We will also continue to ensure that lines of communication remain open with youth residing in GHs so they receive assistance when needed.

If you have any questions or need additional information, please call me or your staff may contact Michelle Day, Children's Group Home Ombudsman, at (213) 893-0551 or via e-mail at mday@auditor.lacounty.gov.

JN:PH:RGC:GH:md

Attachments (3)

c: Sachi A. Hamai, Chief Executive Officer
Philip L. Browning, Director, DCFS
Honorable Michael Nash, Executive Director, Office of Child Protection
Calvin C. Remington, Interim Chief Probation Officer
Audit Committee
Children's Deputies
Commission for Children and Families
Contract Monitoring Division, DCFS
Out-of-Home Care Management Division, DCFS
Placement Permanency and Quality Assurance, Probation
Jessica Gama, Probation Ombudsman
Public Information Office
Sybil Brand Commission

**LOS ANGELES COUNTY CHILDREN'S GROUP HOME OMBUDSMAN
REQUESTS FOR ASSISTANCE RECEIVED
BY TYPE**

July 1, 2015 through December 31, 2015

1. Safety		7
Feeling Unsafe	3	
Expressing Self-Harm	2	
Sexual Abuse	1	
Physical Abuse	1	
2. Personal Rights		28
Food/Dietary Needs	6	
School	5	
Respect	3	
Unfair Treatment	3	
Allowance/Clothing Allowance	2	
Clothing	2	
Family/Social Contacts	2	
Health/Medical, Dental, Psychiatric Care	2	
Church Services	1	
Living Conditions	1	
Neglect	1	
3. "Other"		61
Placement Concerns	12	
Retrieving Personal Belongings/Property	10	
CSW and/or Attorney Contact	8	
Concerns about CSW	6	
Unfair Consequences	5	
Independent Living Program	3	
Money/Survivor Benefits	3	
Peer Issues	3	
Privacy	3	
Hygiene Products/Personal Hygiene	2	
Driver Safety (GH Staff)	1	
Education Rights Holder	1	
Family Visitations	1	
Lack of Outdoor Time	1	
Live Scan Process	1	
Transportation	1	
4. All Types Above - Total		96
5. General Information		24
GH Related	14	
Non-GH Related	10	
6. Total Requests Received by Ombudsman		120

**LOS ANGELES COUNTY CHILDREN'S GROUP HOME OMBUDSMAN
REQUESTS FOR ASSISTANCE RECEIVED
BY GROUP HOME**

July 1, 2015 through December 31, 2015

Group Home Agency	Supervisorial Districts/ Out of County	Number of Requests	Types of Requests
Careprovider Children & Family Services	1	1	•Money
Maryvale	1	3	•Peer Issues •Privacy •School
St. Anne's Maternity Home	1	8	•Concerns about CSW (2) •Clothing Allowance •Education Rights Holder •Independent Living Program •Personal Belongings •Placement Concerns (for child) •Transportation
Hillsides Home for Children	1, 5	2	•Independent Living Program •Placement Concerns
San Gabriel Children's Center	1, 5	1	•Respect
Heritage Group Home, Inc.	1, 4, 5	2	•Health/Medical, Dental, Psychiatric Care •Unfair Consequences
Eggleston Youth Center	1, 5 San Bernardino County	1	•Unfair Consequences
Dangerfield Group Home	2	2	•Concerns about CSW •Clothing
DeliLu Achievement Home	2	2	•Food •Unfair Treatment
Dream Catcher Foundation	2	3	•Food •Hygiene Products •Unfair Treatment
Junior Blind of America	2	3	•CSW Contact (2) •Dietary Needs
Vista Del Mar Child and Family Services	2	2	•Feeling Unsafe •Unfair Consequences
Fleming and Barnes, Inc. dba Dimondale Adolescent Care Facilities	2, 4, 5	2	•Food •Placement Concerns
Aviva Family and Children Services	3	1	•Placement Concerns
Project Six Group Home - The Help Group	3	2	•Food •Placement Concerns

Group Home Agency	Supervisory Districts/ Out of County	Number of Requests	Types of Requests
Human Services Network dba Youth Services Network	3, 5	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •CSW Contact (2) •Personal Belongings •Placement Concerns •Privacy
Penny Lane Centers	3, 5	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Lack of Outdoor Time •Money •Personal Hygiene •Respect
Bayfront Youth & Family Services	4	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Personal Belongings (2) •Health/Medical, Dental, Psychiatric Care •Physical Abuse
Dream Home Care, Inc.	4	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Unfair Consequences
Star View Adolescent Center (Community Treatment Facility)	4	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Expressing Self-Harm (2) •Peer Issues •Sexual Abuse
Bourne, Inc.	5	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Neglect
David and Margaret Youth and Family Services	5	7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Personal Belongings/Property (3) •Placement Concerns (2) •Family/Social Contacts •Unfair Consequences
Leroy Haynes Center	5	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •School
Macro Homes, Inc.	5	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Concerns about CSW •Family Visitations •Personal Belongings
McKinley Children's Center	5	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Concerns about CSW •Feeling Unsafe •Live Scan Process •Placement Concerns
Murrell's Farm and Boys Home	5	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Privacy
Rosemary Children's Services	5	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Living Conditions •Respect •School
Crittenton Services for Children and Families	Orange County	15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Personal Belongings (2) •Placement Concerns (2) •School (2) •Allowance •Church Services •Clothing •Driver Safety (GH Staff) •Family/Social Contacts •Feeling Unsafe •Independent Living Program •Peer Issues •Unfair Treatment
Mary's Shelter	Orange County	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Concerns about CSW •Survivor Benefits

Group Home Agency	Supervisory Districts/ Out of County	Number of Requests	Types of Requests
Paragon Center	Orange County	1	•CSW Contact
Childhelp	Orange County Riverside County	5	•CSW Contact (2) •Attorney Contact •Food •Placement Concerns
TOTAL		96	

**LOS ANGELES COUNTY CHILDREN'S GROUP HOME OMBUDSMAN
GROUP HOME SITE VISITS FOR OUTREACH**

July 1, 2015 through December 31, 2015

Group Home Agency	Supervisorial District(s) / Out of County	Number of Sites	Site Visit Location(s)
Anka Behavioral Health, Inc.*	1	2	•Pomona •Montebello
B & I Group Home	1	2	•Pomona (2)
Candlelight Homes*	1	1	•West Covina
Garces Residential Care Services - Bright Horizon	1	1	•Claremont
Hope House*	1	1	•El Monte
Careprovider Children & Family Services	1, 5	2	•Covina •West Covina
Hillsides Home for Children	1, 5	4	•Altadena •Los Angeles •Pasadena (2)
Angeles Vista Children's Home*	2	1	•Los Angeles
Dream Catcher Foundation	2	3	•Los Angeles
I am Safe, Inc.*	2	1	•Los Angeles
Junior Blind of America (2 visits)	2	1	•Los Angeles
Signs of Life*	2	1	•Los Angeles
Valley Ridge*	2	1	•Los Angeles
West Children's Home*	2	1	•Los Angeles
LifeCircles Unlimited	3	1	•Pacoima
Human Services Network dba Youth Services Network	3, 5	3	•Granada Hills •North Hills •Shadow Hills
Mosaic of Friends IV*	4	1	•Westchester
Olive Crest Treatment Centers, Inc.**	4	1	•Bellflower
Bourne, Inc.	5	2	•Altadena (2)
Casa Editha Foundation Inc. dba Ava Lyn's Group Home	5	1	•Pasadena
Harriet House*	5	1	•Altadena
Pacific Horizons*	5	1	•Temple City
Crittenton Services for Children and Families (2 visits)**	Orange County	1	•Fullerton
Mary's Shelter	Orange County	2	•Santa Ana (2)
Paragon Center	Orange County	1	•Placentia
South Coast Children's Society*	Orange County	1	•Costa Mesa
Childhelp	Orange County Riverside County	4	•Costa Mesa (3) •Beaumont
Field's Comprehensive Youth Services**	San Bernardino County	2	•Rancho Cucamonga •Upland
Total		44	

*Non-Contracted Group Home

**Joint Outreach Visit with the Probation Ombudsman