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April 4, 2016

To: Supervisor Hilda L. Solis, Chair
Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas
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Supervisor Michael D. Antonovich

From: Philip L. Browning
Director

RESPONSE TO THE MAY 12, 2015 BOARD MOTION (ITEM NO. 2) REGARDING RECOVERY SOLUTIONS AND THE FEASIBILITY OF DEVELOPING PLACEMENT OPTIONS THAT WOULD SPECIFICALLY SERVE COMMERCIALLY SEXUALLY EXPLOITED CHILDREN

On May 12, 2015, a motion by Supervisors Hilda L. Solis and Don Knabe directed the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS), the Department of Mental Health (DMH), the Department of Public Social Services (DPSS), the Department of Public Health (DPH), the Department of Health Services (DHS), the Chief Probation Officer, the Public Defender and the Alternate Public Defender to report back on the feasibility of developing placement options that would specifically serve Commercially Sexually Exploited Children (CSEC) who are under the jurisdiction of the Probation Department and DCFS, to provide young sex trafficking victims with a safe place to stay, that has appropriate security features to prevent access by exploiters and provides specialized care to address the trauma of these victims.

BACKGROUND

Under the leadership of the Board of Supervisors, Los Angeles County has proclaimed, "No longer will children and teens in the sex trade be arrested for prostitution – instead they will be treated as victims of abuse and trafficking. There is no such thing as a child prostitute." Recently enacted state laws support this recognition and have placed a focus on victims being moved from the juvenile delinquency system to the child welfare system requiring counties to develop and implement strategies to serve these youth. Child welfare agencies throughout the State have limited experience treating this population due to the fact that until recently these young victims were most often identified by law enforcement and subsequently incarcerated and served through Probation. Identifying the services necessary to address CSEC victims' complex emotional, educational, physical health and housing needs is challenging due to their experiences with physical intimidation and psychological manipulation by their trafficker.

Given their traumatic experiences, these youth are often resistant to treatment and participate in high-risk behaviors such as chronic run away behavior. A major challenge in developing placement and treatment strategies to serve these victims is the lack of evidence-based or best practice programs, and unfortunately, there is not yet consensus among the experts and practitioners regarding a single solution to serve these sexually exploited victims. There is consensus, however, around the concept of building teams, connections and relationships around these youth to help them begin to heal.

PREVAILING PARADIGM

There is agreement throughout the Nation and the State among experts, practitioners and survivors to focus more on the development of an array of services and placement types to address the various stages of change these victims face. Some victims are pre-contemplative and are not able to acknowledge their exploitation as a problem that needs to be changed. Others are getting ready to change, and some youth are making active efforts to get out of "the life." At each stage there is a chance of relapse resulting in returning to "the life" and abandoning any progress made. Properly serving these youth requires constant assessment and re-assessment of their current needs. Remote, less populated placements may be appropriate for those youth participating in the highest risk behaviors such as running away from placement. For other youth, community and urban-based CSEC specific support services may enable them to remain safely within their families and communities. There is an agreement amongst State and County stakeholders that there is a county-wide need for targeted, CSEC focused, trauma based services with a strong emphasis on prevention and aftercare resources.

With the legislative shift moving CSEC victims from delinquency to dependency, there is both a legal and a practice shift from the single child-focused rehabilitative efforts of Probation, to the strength-based child and family centered approach in dependency which focuses on legal mandates to reunify children when safe, and to provide services necessary to facilitate reunification where possible. Dependency law and social work practice are premised on the vision that children thrive in safe families and supportive communities. Given the unique needs of this population, it is of paramount importance that a youth's individualized needs be identified through the use of Multi-Disciplinary Teams and that there be available an array of housing and service options that can be tailored to meet the wide spectrum of needs for each victim and their family and support system.

EXISTING SERVICES

Currently CSEC youth in Los Angeles County are placed in a wide variety of placements dependent upon their individual needs; remaining safely with parents being the first consideration. In a sample of 65 Hotline referrals identifying a CSEC victim or a child at risk of CSEC that subsequently promoted to an open case, where youth were placed in out of home care, approximately 57% were placed in group homes, 36% placed in foster homes and 7% were in relative care. Services that youth receive in these placements include: assignment to an advocate and mental health treatment such as Wraparound/Therapeutic Behavioral Services; medical and dental services; educational advocacy and support; vocational/life

skills/job corps training; legal documentation services; domestic violence and sexual abuse counseling; drug abuse treatment; individual counseling; Regional Center services; sexual health development counseling; prenatal care; parenting; branding removal; and gang reduction services. An examination of the case plans for these youth reflect that there are no two victims whose stories or needs are identical; each youth requires varied, long-term interventions and resources. Thus, our recommendation is to provide a continuum of care that makes services and placement options available ranging from immediate safety to long-term stabilization and aftercare services to improve their opportunities to build healthy connections for full recovery, restoration, and ultimately self-sufficiency once they are no longer system-involved. Such housing options need to include health and wellness programming for minors and transitional age youth.

CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT

A key effort in building teams and connections for these youth has been and will continue to be; leveraging and building capacity with existing multi-disciplinary resources. The County has been on the national forefront in developing very robust CSEC curricula to increase awareness of human trafficking for 4,600 probation officers, social workers, public health workers, mental health providers, group home providers, foster family agencies, attorneys, law enforcement officers, health services workers, advocates, schools, hotel owners as well as community based/non-governmental organizations and community members. Approximately 455 out-of-home care providers, including administrators and direct service staff from group homes, foster parents and foster family agencies, have received prevention training aimed at preventing out-of-home youth from being commercially sexually exploited through better identification of at-risk youth and CSEC recruiters. Approximately 80 providers have participated in the "Train the Trainer" Out-of-Home Care Prevention curriculum. Lastly, 246 providers participated in the facilitator training "Word on the Street," a prevention curriculum for female adolescents created by clinicians, probation officers, social workers, advocates and group home providers.

In Los Angeles County, we regularly use six group homes who received CSEC training from the County early on and continue to be utilized for CSEC placements. We recently became aware of four placement resources outside of Los Angeles County to serve the CSEC population. To build support and expertise within the care provider community, the County convenes a CSEC Group Home Provider Roundtable with approximately 28 Group Home representatives as a means to foster collaboration among group home providers. This group also provides support in dealing with the challenges that arise in caring for this population and examines and addresses safety and licensing concerns that may arise for youth who tend to chronically AWOL.

In addition to working with placements, a large focus is on building capacity to enable advocates and providers to follow a youth wherever they reside. We are building this support capacity through expansion of the current contracts with our CSEC advocacy groups, as well as the expansion of the Succeeding Through Achievement and Resilience (STAR) Court and the utilization of Multidisciplinary Teams (MDTs) in the dependency system.

Recognizing that we need a continuum of care for this population, in addition to looking to local resources, the county has assessed currently utilized out-of-county and out-of-state alternatives for CSEC youth with the highest needs. These will remain a valuable resource within our placement continuum in the future. Members of the Integrated Leadership Team (ILT) along with Los Angeles County representatives visited out-of-state placement options in Arizona to assess their utilization for Los Angeles County CSEC youth.

Similar to leveraging existing placement options, existing services are leveraged and sexually exploited youth, as well as their families, are referred to existing services based on their treatment needs that can support the placement; including, but not limited to, one-on-one supervision, Wraparound services, Family Preservation, and survivor/advocacy services.

INITIAL DATA REVIEW

While evidence-based programs for the CSEC population do not exist, there has been some initial review of placement options and outcomes for the CSEC population served by Los Angeles County. Interviews were conducted with 40 CSEC victims being served by Probation to solicit their input and the interviews indicated that CSEC victims' placement preferences vary along the continuum of placement options and locations. The majority of the interviewees expressed a placement preference for smaller facilities such as six-bed group homes or foster homes. The CSEC survivors noted that they thought these settings would provide more of a family setting with more opportunities and services. Some interviewees indicated a preference for large group homes. The interviews also explored placement location, with the greatest number of interviewees responding that they prefer a local group home, followed by those who preferred a remote location, with the smallest number expressing interest in out-of-state placement. Victims stated a preference that a local placement be close enough for family to visit on a regular basis. The majority of those interviewed expressed a preference for placements to be with other foster children and not placements exclusively for CSEC victims. A smaller number of victms expressed an interest in placement settings exclusively for CSEC victims.

Probation has captured data surrounding the number of days a Probation youth remains in placement. Since 2012, 3% of the suitable placements were out-of-state, 35% were out-of-county and 62% within Los Angeles County. The average length of stay varied with out-of-state at 219 days, out-of-county at 65 days and within Los Angeles County 57 days. While these numbers may signify a positive outcome for the out-of-state placements, further evaluation is needed as to the long-term treatment success of these placements. Probation has reported that while AWOL episodes may be low when a youth is out-of-state, youth tend to run away when returning to Los Angeles County. There is a hypothesis that out-of-state placements may not be preparing youth with the necessary independent living skills to re-enter their communities of origin. This includes the necessary community connections, support and coping skills to live independently when returned to their communities. Further evaluation of long-term outcomes is needed.

CHALLENGES AND NEW RESOURCES

While leveraging existing placement and service provider resources, DCFS and Probation are responsive in concurrently looking for new placement resources. Adding a new layer of complexity to the housing issue is the fact that this paradigm shift from delinquency to child welfare regarding the CSEC population has occurred simultaneously with legislative efforts to reform the Continuum of Care (CCR) for foster youth. CCR seeks to eliminate long-term congregate care with an increased emphasis on home-based placement settings with individualized service plans based on the individual needs of the youth. Assembly Bill (AB) 403 is a comprehensive reform effort that in part transforms group homes into a new category of congregate care facility defined as Short-Term Residential Treatment Centers (STRTCs) and revises the foster care rate structure. Further, a group home moratorium is still operative and applies to applications by new providers; as well as, to existing group home providers, applying for new programs, rate increases or increased program capacity.

Los Angeles County is facing many of the same issues as other Southern California counties and we are working with a coalition of counties to determine the feasibility of a regional placement facility that can be utilized by each of the counties. It would be an opportunity for Southern California counties to jointly serve CSEC identified youth. The ideal provider would be one that has one or two existing homes that could be used to accommodate this population. The program would encourage a one-year commitment from the youth with the possibility of a six-month extension. While a regional facility merits consideration, further research is recommended to address the feasibility and efficacy of using a regional placement facility model in light of impending CCR changes.

In addition to the challenge, the group home moratorium brings in the development of a single placement facility, AB 403 brings with it additional considerations. Due to the significant trauma experienced by many CSEC victims, residential treatment programs for the CSEC population can be one or more years in duration. This is at odds with the goal of AB 403 to use congregate care only for short term, intensive treatment. Further, the creation of STRTCs and a new rate system make it difficult, if not impossible, to determine at this point in time the actual costs of operating a facility once the provisions of AB 403 become effective. As the State is in the process of providing counties with guidelines regarding the implementation of CCR, there is recognition that CSEC is a unique population for whom there must be special consideration.

NEXT STEPS

While there has been some initial review of outcomes and anecdotal reporting, there has not been a comprehensive evaluation of the efficacy of the existing programs and services offered to CSEC in Los Angeles County. As noted, there is no consensus among the experts regarding a single solution to the recovery of sexually exploited victims and there are no evidence-based practices to model. An evaluation would aid the County in determining which programs to support and where to allocate the available Healthier Communities, Stronger Families, Thriving Children (HST) funds. In the October 16, 2015 Board Letter, the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) noted that the efficacy of programs and interventions are unknown at

this time and recommended using HST funds to fund an evaluation. As recommended by the CEO; DCFS and Probation will work together to procure the services of a consultant to develop a plan and assessment tool to track CSEC in the County and to evaluate the efficacy and effectiveness of the County's CSEC current prevention, intervention, and aftercare efforts. Recognizing that the need for services and supports extends beyond a CSEC youth's 18th birthday, the evaluation will also consider service gaps for the transitional age youth (TAY) population as well.

The County is moving forward with drafting a Statement of Work for a consultant to conduct an evaluation that will outline current services in place in Los Angeles County; recommended programs that need to be further explored, and a cost analysis. This will provide an informed recommendation, along with a cost analysis, of how the County should move forward to serve our CSEC youth and their families with an array of services that will provide a continuum of victim-centered, culturally competent and linguistically appropriate services.

The CSEC Executive Committee, which is composed of the County Departments named in the May 12th Board motion along with several community stakeholders, continue to monitor the statewide and nationwide progress and plans for best practice with CSEC victims. Further exploration is needed to evaluate and consider what placement gaps exist within the current placement continuum in Los Angeles County; as well as, enhance and align the existing services and resources to ensure a cohesive continuum of care. At this time there is no recommendation on how to allocate the available HST funds. The above referenced evaluation will provide ideas and guidance on what the greatest needs are and the services and supports that should be supported with the HST funds.

Any such residential program will need to be in compliance with AB 403 and CCR, which places a focus provision of individualized and coordinated services and supports in the most family like setting while utilizing congregate care solely as a short-term, intensive intervention to support transitioning to a family. The exploration of a targeted CSEC-focused, community based and trauma informed continuum of service for the recovery and restoration of CSEC victims is in alignment with CCR.

If you have any questions or need additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me or Aldo Marin, Board Relations Manager at (213) 351-5530.

PLB:DI:ns

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