



Dana E. Blackwell
Executive Director

LOS ANGELES COUNTY COMMISSION FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

COMMISSIONERS:
CAROL O. BIONDI, VICE CHAIR
PATRICIA CURRY
HON. JOYCE FAHEY
HELEN A. KLEINBERG
DAISY MA, VICE CHAIR
DR. LA-DORIS MCCLANEY
REV. CECIL L. MURRAY
SANDRA RUDNICK
ADELINA SORKIN, LCSW/ACSW
DR. HARRIETTE F. WILLIAMS, CHAIR
STACEY F. WINKLER

APPROVED MINUTES

The General Meeting of the Commission for Children and Families was held on Monday, **June 6, 2005**, in room 743 of the Kenneth Hahn Hall of Administration, 500 West Temple Street, Los Angeles. **Please note that these minutes are intended as a summary and not as a verbatim transcription of events at this meeting.**

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT (Quorum Established)

Carol O. Biondi
Patricia Curry
Hon. Joyce Fahey
Helen Kleinberg
Dr. La-Doris McClaney
Sandra Rudnick
Adelina Sorkin
Dr. Harriette F. Williams
Stacey F. Winkler

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT (Excused/Unexcused)

Daisy Ma
Rev. Cecil L. Murray

APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA

The agenda for the June 6, 2005, meeting was unanimously approved.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Commissioner Sorkin asked that the minutes of the April 18, 2005, meeting be held pending a proposed amendment.

The minutes of the May 2, 2005, general meeting were unanimously approved.

The minutes of the May 16, 2005, general meeting were unanimously approved.

CHAIR'S REPORT

- Chair Williams welcomed returning Commissioner Stacey F. Winkler, and announced that Rev. Cecil L. Murray would also be joining the Commission; his appointment has been confirmed by the Board of Supervisors.
- Chair Williams attended last week's independent living program (ILP) graduation at Disney Hall, sponsored by the United Friends of the Children and produced by Suzanne Depass. As always, it was one of the outstanding events of the year.
- Commissioner McClaney was honored yesterday by the Stovall Educational Uplift Foundation, and gave an inspirational speech about the future to the twelve scholarship recipients.
- On May 21, Vice Chair Biondi was honored by Homeboy Industries at an event at the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion. She spoke about second chances for gang members and their families to an overwhelming ovation. The event raised over \$1 million, and Father Greg Boyle was very grateful. Homegirl Industries was also represented, in recognition of the gang-related challenges that young women also face.
- Chair Williams thanked Vice Chair Ma for representing the Commission on the oversight committee dealing with the court parking revenue trust fund.
- Vice Chair Biondi reminded Commissioners participating on Partnership Conference panels that their resumes are needed, and to provide them to staff. Conference panels will include one on 300/600 children, and the luncheon speaker will be Shay Bilchik, head of the Child Welfare League of America. The Commission will report on its three work-group initiatives (prevention, reunification, and permanency).
- Three kinship support meetings have taken place, led by Michael Gray and including representatives from the department's training division and from Probation. The group is moving through a logic model in developing this new division, and will submit its report to Dr. David Sanders by June 15.
- The June 21 meeting of the Commission will take place at the department's Belvedere office, where Commissioners will hear a presentation on concurrent planning. The meeting is scheduled on a Tuesday because of the Child Welfare League conference that Monday. The rest of the summer Commission meetings have yet to be finalized, though it looks as though August 1 and 15 are firm.
- On June 22, Commissioner Kleinberg will present a draft of the continuum of care to the SPA 8 Council for stakeholder feedback. That meeting will take place from 2:30 to 4:30 p.m. at a location to be announced in SPA 8.
- A conference call is being scheduled to work on refining the C4 model. The draft will come before the Commission for final approval, but anyone wishing to participate in the call should notify staff.

- A community/staff panel has met to help in the selection of retiring deputy director Russ Carr's replacement. Chair Williams served on this group, along with management-level staff from Bienvenidos, United Care, and Vista Del Mar, as well as the two chairs of the staff advisory committee and regional administrators or assistant regional administrators from the Antelope Valley, Santa Fe Springs, Wateridge, and Century offices. This position is in charge of SPAs 2 and 4 and the hotline, and has also worked closely on kinship issues. All job candidates were from within the department, and panel members ranked them individually.
- Chair Williams urged Commission members to read the Board order for alternative-use group home strategies and the department's draft group home plan outline, both of which present detailed information.

DIRECTOR'S REPORT

- Point of Engagement (POE) rollout continues in the Metro, West Los Angeles, and Torrance offices. Last year, representatives from the Senate and Assembly budget committees visited to observe this work; the department recently got word that it will receive \$400,000 to expand and evaluate POE. This is not part of the governor's budget, nor will it have to be part of a conference committee, since the appropriations language is the same in both Senate and Assembly bills. The Board of Supervisors has agreed to send a five-signature letter of support for this appropriation to the governor, and Dr. Sanders asked if the Commission would also send such a letter. Beverly Muench from his staff will develop the wording.
- The department has received 220 responses from 70 agencies to its RFP for Promoting Safe and Stable Families more than twice the number of proposals received for any prior initiative. Proposals to provide family preservation services (using office-area geographic boundaries) numbered 70, while adoption services proposals (using SPA boundaries) numbered 40. The balance were for family support services, which also use SPA boundaries. These proposals are now being evaluated, and the contract should go to the Board of Supervisors in late July for an August start-up.

Commissioner Kleinberg asked about the allocation of dollars, hoping that someday it can be based on an analysis of caseloads and need. Dr. Sanders explained that family preservation money has historically been allocated based on the number of children in out-of-home care. Family support allocations are related to poverty rates and the numbers of children, and adoption-services allocations to another formula. He agreed that rethinking all three areas to base them on need is a good idea, though the special services fund will provide some additional dollars into next year. The Probation Department has direct access to family preservation contracts through DCFS. Specific future allocations are yet to be discussed.

The evaluation of family preservation performed by Dr. Barbara Solomon spoke of success on the front end rather than with cases that are very old. Commissioner Sorkin asked if that was being taken into consideration, particularly for families who

may have risk issues but no safety issues, and who need immediate help. Dr. Sanders replied that the structure is designed to deal with new children coming into care. He is hoping to tie it in to the regional offices, but referrals are primarily made through emergency response. A small pool of resources for alternative response—25 or 30 percent of the funding—has been built in to serve families that do not enter the placement system. His intent is to hold family preservation contractors to providing services within 24 hours, as recommended by the reunification work group. The family support program is structured to give priority to families that are not at the point of needing an alternative response, so they may be referred directly to family support services. It will be a challenge to monitor, Dr. Sanders said, especially since the family support piece is being reduced from \$11 million to \$3.2 million per year.

Starting in July, \$7.1 million in budget savings will go toward prevention and family reunification, supplemented by the special services fund. Family preservation funds can be used during the last 30 days that a child is in care, and a child can be referred to family preservation only during that 30-day period.

Chair Williams reminded Commissioners of Dr. Solomon's original consulting work for the county some years ago, when it was county policy that family preservation money could not be used for a child to attend camp. The issue was raised again at the planning meeting last Friday. Is this a county decision only? Nationally, those funds are being used for that purpose. Dr. Sanders acknowledged that the issue had arisen as the RFP was being developed, and said he would check. Chair Williams stressed the importance of finding more money for informal kinship referrals, and Commissioner Curry suggested using wraparound funds for those kinds of services.

- The medical HUB at County/USC is up and running, and the Board letter is being prepared for the remaining four HUBs at Harbor/UCLA, Olive View, King/Drew, and Antelope Valley medical centers. It is anticipated that everything will be in place by fall to implement the requirement that all new youth coming into care first visit a medical HUB for screening. Building a system through the HUBs to better track and share medical information is also being considered.

Despite the problems currently being experienced at King/Drew, its pediatric unit is considered excellent, and its geographic location completes the necessary countywide access. Each proposed HUB has its area of expertise, so youth may be referred to Harbor/UCLA, for instance, if they need to be assessed for sexual abuse. Childrens Hospital Los Angeles will also be involved, though not on a round-the-clock basis.

Commissioner Kleinberg expressed great concern about the transporting of children, given the department's history with a similar HUB at MacLaren Children's Center. Dr. Sanders reported that, initially, the HUB system would use taxi-cabs, with the cost and effectiveness of that approach to be analyzed. The current system—medical assessment data not being shared with anyone in the community, and decisions being made based on inadequate information—must be improved. Workers will be required to transport children for their assessments, and they will be seen by experts. Commis-

sioner Fahey encouraged a context for the examinations; interviewers must know how to ask the right questions. A child's partnership with the person transporting him or her is as critical as the relationship with the medical examiner, and Commissioner Winkler suggested that a volunteer outreach group such as the court-appointed special advocates (CASA) be recruited to assist with transportation.

- The Permanency Partners Program (P3) is underway in nine offices, with retirees helping youth with no permanency plan, in care two years or longer, to identify life-long adult relationships. Because each office designed its own version of the program, staff is committed to P3, and anecdotal evidence suggests it is succeeding. Dr. Sanders promised to bring back more concrete information once it is available.
- The Lancaster West office has moved to Palmdale, and Rick Bryant has been named regional administrator there; Paul Buehler serves as regional administrator in Lancaster. Both men are committed to the area and its community-based activities.
- The implementation of strategic decision-making continues to go well, with a dramatic improvement in reassessment rates, especially in the Century, Lancaster, and Palmdale offices. Using a case-reading tool from the Children's Resource Center, supervisors and regional administrators review cases—including high-risk emergency response cases deemed inconclusive—on a random basis. Some departmental reviews are also done when concerns in specific areas arise. Commissioner Kleinberg asked that alternative-response cases be reviewed, and Dr. Sanders will explore that.
- Dr. Sanders met with members of the Association of Community Human Service Agencies (ACHSA) regarding the command post's need for high-end crisis beds. Lakewood regional administrator Joi Russell is chairing three short-term work groups looking into tying the concept of reception centers to the medical HUBs in family-friendly locations, and enhancing the experience of youth coming into care. Chair Williams asked for meeting dates for Commissioners wishing to serve on these groups. Vernon Brown, who runs the reception centers in Contra Costa County that Commissioner Sorkin and department staff visited in 2003, is also involved.

At least \$2 million of the MacLaren Children's Center funds were earmarked for reception centers, which have value not only for older youth but for large sibling groups. At one time, emergency foster families were recruited to provide a minimum of four beds in one home so that siblings could avoid going to a shelter—a continued area of focus. A lot of data is available on children needing services, but a small group of youth (now being seen at the command post) fall outside of predefined frameworks. Dr. Sanders hopes that individualized service plans will address this.

- The department is working with First 5 L.A.'s Partnership for Families on a proposal to provide most of the alternative-response funding for children birth to age five so that services to high-risk and very high-risk youth can be expanded.

According to recent minutes of the Board of Supervisors, the county is planning to lease office space at 8300 and 8400 South Vermont Avenue, a potential site of support in SPA 6. Was Casey Family Programs a part of that decision? Will a kinship support center be housed there? Will KEPS training, with on-site child care, occur there? Chair Williams asked that Dr. Sanders report back on this site and its timeline and future.

She also requested information regarding the co-location of social workers and probation officers at schools in SPA 6, as well as a report on the clerical staff ratio or 'yardstick.'

NEW BUSINESS

- An interview with Judge Michael Nash printed last week in the *Los Angeles Times* contained a charge to the Commission regarding serious problems with record-keeping in the education of foster youth. Vice Chair Biondi asked that the Commission make some response to that charge.
- Commissioner Curry asked about the agenda item before the Board of Supervisors this week regarding the department's no longer needing to comply with requests to provide out-of-home care evaluations to the court. Dr. Sanders said that County Counsel recently determined that the process used for the last three years was not legal, and reports will no longer be sent to the court.
- Commissioner Sorkin asked for a report on the situation at Metropolitan State Hospital, including the number of children occupying the 39 county-contracted beds, their status and how long they have been there, and the status of the AWOL children mentioned in a *Los Angeles Times* article printed today.

PROBATION DEPARTMENT UPDATE

- Chief Probation Officer Paul Higa reported that the Probation Department has 1,500 youth placed in group homes and anticipates a slight rise within the next 18 months. Approximately 42 percent of youth coming into foster care through Probation have also experienced DCFS activity. Though the number of orders has increased from 145 per month in 2002 to 195 in 2005, the numbers of children in placement has not varied much—a sign that Probation is doing a better job of keeping kids in placement only as long as they need to be. The number of 18-year-olds, in fact, has decreased 31 percent over the last three years.

Probation is currently revisiting its policies regarding children under 15, since it has learned that the camp environment is not the best experience for younger children, who need more individual care and fewer unrealistic expectations (that 13- and 14-year-olds will act like 17- and 18-year olds, for instance). This is an ongoing educational process with staff and bench officers. The most serious concern is that children with little delinquent experience are housed in the camps with older offenders.

As long as they meet certain criteria, 350 children per year will be diverted to group home placements, and Probation is working with providers regarding their special needs for programming, incentives, and planning. Close to 200 youth are currently in

juvenile hall awaiting placement, and a multidisciplinary effort to develop a Request for Interest (RFI) for a group home assessment center is underway. Since November 2003, a two-man team has returned 391 AWOL youth to their placements.

The way group homes do business cannot remain static, Mr. Higa said, and the quality of services needs to be improved to focus on evidence-based outcomes and best practices. Residential treatment and day treatment are models to be explored, and education and preparing youth for emancipation need to be priorities. Commissioner Kleinberg agreed, framing the central question as “If we want to have kids who look different when they leave us, what do we do to make that happen?”

Struck by Mr. Higa’s comments on establishing more reasonable expectations for younger children, Commissioner Fahey asked about the culture change within Probation necessary to accomplish that. Mr. Higa acknowledged that in terms of the camps, it was difficult. The most important piece is individualized attention—younger children will get that one way or another, and finding developmentally appropriate structures for positive attention is critical. Commissioner Fahey suggested that the Commission spend some time on Probation’s culture change this year. She also asked that Mr. Higa find out if the percentage of Probation kids who were involved in informal juvenile court could be tracked.

- Since January 2005, **AB 129** has allowed counties the option of dual status for a child under both the delinquency and dependency courts, which can address conflicting case plans and treatment goals, as well as a lack of effective coordination, cooperation, and communication. Counties elsewhere have tried this option, but it’s not clear what has actually been achieved for the child. Elements that contribute to success include family conferencing, multidisciplinary teams, specialized training for bench officers, small caseloads, and family-focused interventions. A June 20 meeting coordinated by the Child Welfare League of America will bring together teams from other counties to discuss best practices.
- **Proposition 63** addressed three key areas:
 - Homelessness and resources needed for shelter construction
 - Transitional resource centers, allowing for storefront centers and navigators to help clients access services
 - Mental health services in camps, including a comprehensive assessment for all children, linkages to the community when they are released, and decentralized psychotropic medication (so that youth needing psychotropic medication can be placed in camps other than Challenger)

Not only must children taking psychotropic medications be monitored by a psychiatrist, nurses familiar with potential effects are needed to alert someone in case a change in dosage or prescription is indicated. (About \$2 million in TAY funding is for mental health staff, and Commissioner Curry will look into that tomorrow.) Medical records are usually available, but nonmedical staff don’t necessarily know what

they're looking at. Safeguards must be put into place from the beginning, since reactions to medications can be dangerous.

Commissioner Winkler asked about volunteer psychiatrists helping with assessments and monitoring children, as she recalls happened in the past. The Juvenile Mental Health Court is a good model of that kind of program, Mr. Higa said, and services once provided by the Department of Mental Health are moving to UCLA.

Commissioner Winkler also asked about individual computer records that could be viewed and updated by anyone working with the child, a concept that the county has been discussing for many years. Confidentiality is the primary hurdle; individual records are available within departments, but not across them. At MacLaren Children's Center, however, all professional staff had access, something that could serve as a precedent for other initiatives. Unfortunately, Mr. Higa said, the commitment has not been made to automate initial records.

Commissioner Curry cautioned against a duplication of assessments funded by Proposition 63 and the Schiff-Cardenas Act, and suggested restructuring so that the money went into one pot. An internal discussion with DMH is needed, Mr. Higa said, since almost all mental health providers want to use their own assessments.

Vice Chair Biondi brought up family group decision-making, which—though no formal evaluation has been funded—she understands is successful in the few camps where it is used. Mr. Higa agreed that it is good for staff, but questioned whether it makes a difference after the child is released. Connections to families are not being made in the camps as they should be, Vice Chair Biondi said, citing the fact that some probation officers still use the suspension of phone privileges as a punishment. Mr. Higa promised to get what data he could on family group decision-making and share it with the Commission.

GROUP HOME PROGRESS UPDATE

Lisa Parrish, deputy director of bureau of resources, reported that the group home work group was established in late April and has met weekly since that time; it will gather twice more prior to its submission of a report to the Board of Supervisors. The group consists of 15 providers, the parent of a foster child, a former youth in care, and representatives from Probation and Mental Health. Its work has proceeded on two tracks:

- The development of immediate transition strategies for group home providers moving to treatment intervention rather than placement intervention
- Moving toward the goal of serving youth in their homes and communities in the least restrictive setting possible

Just under 2,000 children live in group homes, with two-thirds of those in placement longer than 24 months. Over 400 are 12 years old and younger, the population most in need of family-based settings. DCFS's vision for the future includes a decreased reliance on group homes and an increased focus on defining their residential treatment capacity, seating them in a treatment continuum that results in permanency. But what might this

mean in the short term for facilities in financial difficulties because of fewer beds being filled? A proposed program at Hollygrove, for instance, would pilot transitional wrap-around services with a residential component, the conversion of some beds to short-term assessment beds, and the provision of enhanced case management and mental health services for D rate placements. Other providers are experimenting with other options.

Work group stakeholders have outlined a vision of converting to a treatment focus that includes aftercare and emancipation components. Three subgroups are examining models for assessment, intensive crisis beds, and individualized contracts, and the larger group is talking with ACHSA about a reinvestment model, looking for resources and flexible funding. About \$7.1 million in specialized services funds could be used for a focus on finding and reconnecting families rather than on residential treatment.

The Board of Supervisors expects a report from the work group by June 15, but a two-week extension will be requested to finalize the group's thinking and better lay out immediate and long-term strategies. The group is working with the California Alliance and the California Welfare Directors Association regarding rates, financing, and legislation. It will continue its efforts for the next six to nine months, ultimately presenting a blueprint for residential care that will address capacity, treatment and permanency services, the continuum of care supporting permanency, performance measures, and flexible financing.

The ensuing conversation centered on the need for providers to be assured that their beds and services are still needed, even if in a different context than in the past. The county is not trying to put group homes out of business—simply to help them change direction and serve a different population, providing needed treatment options (respite care for foster parents and relative caregivers, for example, or emergency placements for large sibling groups). All departments, not just DCFS, should look at the potential of group homes to bring parents and children together and return kids to their communities. Commissioner Sorkin likened the situation to that of the March of Dimes, which was formed to fight polio. It could have gone out of business when the Salk vaccine was developed, but instead it broadened its scope to birth defects and reinvented itself. However, according to Commissioner Curry, the biggest obstacle for providers is that of trust: when group homes have been asked by the county and the department to change in the past, doing so (usually at great cost) has seldom been to their benefit.

The concept of short-term assessment beds provoked discussion as well, with various Commissioners recalling that MacLaren Children's Center also had a 30-day limit, but children sometimes languished there for years. Accountability for ongoing cases is a concern, and they can easily get out of control. The 30 days are for assessing treatment needs and finding family members, Ms. Parrish said, or for arranging individualized service contracts if family cannot be found. Family group decision-making meetings will be scheduled on the day after placement and every seven days thereafter if no case plan has been finalized; regional administrators or assistant regional administrators are responsible for follow-up. Some older children, Commissioner Curry said, especially those with mental health issues, have been in and out of group homes and their families are not

readily available. Finding their parents, holding a meeting, and locating a placement simply isn't possible within the 23-hour timeframe.

Commissioner Winkler asked about the financial implications of a group home's switch to assessment beds, and Ms. Parrish acknowledged that those details—which involve Community Care Licensing rates—still must be worked out.

Commissioner Sorkin asked about out-of-county beds; DCFS contracts for 3,000 beds within Los Angeles County and 1,000 outside the county. (Some foster family placements are also made out of county, mostly because of kinship location.) If out-of-county placements are needed because of a lack of high-end programs in Los Angeles, group homes could consider providing those resources. Commissioner Curry suggested developing a profile of the children out-of-county placements and why they are there.

Chair Williams concluded the discussion by saying that work group members are aware that many reasons exist for group homes to be reluctant to change their way of doing business, including licensing, insurance, and liability issues, not to mention cash flow. In the next six to nine months, the work group will get wider input, especially from some critical missing players like the courts and Community Care Licensing.

Chair Williams asked Commissioners to read the report distributed in their packets and to give written feedback to staff, who will ensure that Ms. Parrish receives it prior to the finalization of the report for the Board of Supervisors.

PUBLIC COMMENT

There was no public comment.

MEETING ADJOURNED