



LOS ANGELES COUNTY COMMISSION FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Kimberly A. Foster
Executive Director

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ADELINA SORKIN, LCSW/ACSW, VICE CHAIR
DR. HARRIETTE F. WILLIAMS
TRULA J. WORTHY-CLAYTON

APPROVED MINUTES

The General Meeting of the Commission for Children and Families was held on Monday, **July 16, 2007**, in room 739 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
Ann E. Franzen
Susan F. Friedman
Helen A. Kleinberg
Dr. La-Doris McClaney
Adelina Sorkin
Trula J. Worthy-Clayton

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT (Excused/Unexcused)

Patricia Curry
Rev. Cecil L. Murray
Sandra Rudnick
Stacey Savelle
Dr. Harriette F. Williams

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

The agenda for the July 16, 2007, meeting was unanimously approved.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The minutes of the July 2, 2007, general meeting were unanimously approved.

CHAIR'S REPORT

Chair Kleinberg announced that the Board of Supervisors has identified William T Fujioka as the county's new Chief Executive Officer. He will start in the position at the end of July.

DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Department of Children and Family Services director Trish Ploehn updated Commissioners on a number of items.

- The National Association of Counties, which recognizes innovative county government programs, has presented Los Angeles County with a 2007 achievement award for its co-location of children's social workers with law enforcement.
- The Board of Supervisors will tomorrow consider the updated Katie A. plan, implementing a settlement agreement for the lawsuit that sought to ensure mental health services for DCFS children. The revised plan's eight components will cost \$90.3 million; of that, Federal and state governments will cover approximately two-thirds, but the county is responsible for \$33.3 million. DCFS will receive \$20 million of the plan's first-year allocation of \$23 million, and the Board is expected to request reports on implementation every six months.

Research shows that the county is doing a better job of drawing down Federal EPSDT (Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnosis, and Treatment) monies, and progress is being made on establishing the 500 new wraparound slots to be in place by June 2008. However, recruitment issues are slowing preparations for 300 new therapeutic foster care beds (to be in place by January 2008), and they may need to be phased in.

At a future Commission meeting, Chair Kleinberg would like to return to the topic of foster homes for Katie A. children, and their options if they lack families.

- Ms. Ploehn presented a fact sheet on the five-year Title IV-E waiver demonstration project, which began July 1. A recent 5 percent increase in rates paid to relative caregivers, state-licensed foster homes, and group homes has reduced the projections of monies available for reinvestment (initially about \$12.5 million annually) to \$4.2 million annually—\$3.3 million for DCFS and \$840,000 for the Probation Department. Despite these cuts, Los Angeles County remains committed to the waiver, and Supervisor Yaroslavsky has a motion pending that will ask the Chief Executive Office to work with departments to identify county funds that could fill some gaps.

Ms. Ploehn again invited Commissioners to attend the all-day Learning Organization Group (LOG) event on the waiver, scheduled for Friday, July 27.

- Six months ago, the backlog of Adoptions and Safe Families Act (ASFA) relative home assessments was over 3,200; as of last Friday, only 58 assessments remained in the queue. Similar reductions have occurred with interstate compacts for the placement of children (ICPCs), which had numbered in the hundreds and are now down to 38. This reflects the good work done by DCFS units and other states, Ms. Ploehn said, in getting homes approved by California standards.

To clean up the ASFA backlog, each DCFS regional office created a special ASFA unit, deploying a total of 1,925 ASFA workers over 18 offices. Those workers have

now gone back to their caseloads, and the responsibility for scheduling and performing initial ASFA assessments and regular reassessments has returned to the kinship support division, which has about 70 employees. On a monthly basis, MAPP (Management Appraisal and Performance Plan) goals will measure the transfer of responsibility between ASFA workers and case-carrying social workers.

Lara Holtzman from the Alliance for Children's Rights asked about reports she has heard that homes are being denied because "ASFA is pending," but Ms. Ploehn was unaware of any denials being issued for that reason. Because homes must be deemed safe, their use may be denied if caregivers refuse to cooperate in inspections, background checks, and the like, but families can always reapply. Ms. Holtzman said that her organization is seeing old cases in which children have been in homes for years, the relatives are cooperative, and yet the paperwork has never been processed and homes are denied. Ms. Ploehn asked that these cases be brought to her individual attention, and Chair Kleinberg requested that the Commission be advised as well.

- No further word from the auditor-controller's office has been received regarding the Proposition A analysis on the cost-effectiveness of contracting out ASFA assessments to the private sector. Now that such a streamlined operation is being performed within the department, Ms. Ploehn feels the point may be moot.
- At the June 16 DCFS recruitment fair in Hawthorne, 180 employment applications were submitted, primarily for social workers and health services aides. Of these, 21 have met the qualifying standards and 15 are pending further information. Susan Jakubowski characterized this ratio as a fairly good result given the general 'walk-in' nature of the event; Ms. Ploehn estimated that perhaps somewhat more than half of the qualified group may ultimately be hired. Human resources processing, interviews, written examinations, and background checks can take as long as eight weeks, so it may be several months before new employees are on board. Only four applications were received for the open data positions, and none had the needed qualifications. Finding skilled information technology people is a countywide concern, since pay scales in the private sector are considerably above the county's.

At Vice Chair Sorkin's request, Ms. Jakubowski will get the Commission information on how many of the Hawthorne event's qualified applicants speak Spanish.

- The prevention initiative demonstration project's Request for Information yielded 19 agencies with 28 proposals, covering all eight service planning areas (SPAs). Contracts will be issued soon, and the initiative will begin in September or October.

TITLE IV-E WAIVER REVISED IMPLEMENTATION—PROBATION

The Probation Department's Jitahadi Imara presented reinvestment projections for his department's part in the Title IV-E waiver demonstration project, noting that the recent reduction in funds has caused Probation to scale back its planned three initiatives to two.

- In the juvenile halls, mental health and education specialists will perform **cross-systems assessments** to better match individual children's placement needs. Under the Department of Justice settlement, the halls are under tremendous pressure to keep populations low, and youth must be moved out within a short time. Probation is working with the Department of Mental Health to develop a conventional assessment; if further services are indicated—as they are for between 12 and 25 percent of the youth assessed—placement assessment centers perform additional screening. A snapshot of that process was completed last week, and a report should be forthcoming. Expanding these assessments is contingent on the Board of Supervisors' approval of funding, which has been delayed from July to September of this year.
- **Multisystemic therapy and family-functioning therapy programs**, which work with families as well as youth, will be expanded and used as aftercare programs following placement. A July 19 meeting with Judge Michael Nash and other bench officers will convey information on these programs and why they are preferred over what has been used in the past.

Over the next six months, Probation should discover how fast these initiatives can be implemented and what barriers are being encountered. Contributing factors include:

- AB 129
- Treatment strategies (countywide and regional tactics will be discussed with providers at next week's LOG meeting)
- The involvement of Casey Family Programs
- The involvement of the faith-based community
- MIOPRA (Mentally Ill Offender Crime Reduction Act) grants
- Additional funding streams such as SSI

Original waiver projections assumed a maximum of 200 youth coming out of group homes within a six-month period, having spent 12 to 14 months in residential treatment. With aftercare services, treatment time could be cut to six months and savings could be realized. In theory, the best interests of youth are served by their being reunified with their families as soon as possible; in practice, however, additional resources are usually necessary for youth released from group homes at the six-month mark, and ways to structure those services are being explored with providers. Mr. Imara said that he would be glad to report on the implementation in a few months, when its shape is more evident.

RESIDENTIALLY BASED SERVICES WORK GROUP

Commissioner Worthy-Clayton reported on the residentially based services work group, led by DCFS's Lisa Parrish, that includes representatives from DCFS, the Department of Mental Health, the Probation Department, and residential treatment centers. The group has developed a work plan for the next five years to see departments and providers through the transition toward permanency and early intervention, and the resulting need for fewer residential beds. In addition, group members have discussed:

- The consequences of reductions in the Title IV-E waiver plan
- The possibility that the Board of Supervisors may increase funding for the prevention initiative in September
- How facilities can work together when beds are closed; as, for example, during the merger of The Sycamores and Hathaway Children's Services
- Designing a monitoring instrument that will capture identical information on youth placed in residential settings from both DCFS and Probation

FAITH-BASED COMMITTEE

Commissioner Franzen thanked everyone who has helped the faith-based committee grow over the past two years, especially co-chairs Harvey Kawasaki and Nina Sorkin.

Tina Marshall introduced herself as a recovering addict, and related her experiences from the late 1980s, giving birth to children addicted to methamphetamines, having them removed by DCFS, entering residential treatment to get her children back, and succumbing to addiction again. In January 2004, she entered a treatment program that introduced her to a church, and she now considers it a blessing that her children were removed, so that she could find the faith to get to where she is today—free from mind-altering drugs for nearly three and a half years. She is employed as an administrative assistant at a residential program for women and children, introducing women to churches with people who can help them with recovery. Ms. Marshall sees 12-step programs as only a springboard to the faith-based recovery she believes everyone needs. After battling addiction for 25 years, she now gets to experience “normal people” who have never been high, and can be an example of a good mother, a good employee, and a good friend. “It’s got nothing to do with anything I’ve done,” she said. “God stepped into my life. Who you see now is not the person who walked into treatment three and a half years ago.”

As one of the many church mentors for Ms. Marshall and her husband, Sandy Martin said that Ms. Marshall “walked into our hearts” when she entered their bible study group. The church family became the couple’s “cheerleaders for change,” planting seeds of compassion, love, and encouragement to grow “a rainbow of hope,” as Ms. Martin put it. She found standing by a family a most rewarding experience, sharing the celebration of events—their first Mother’s Day as a family, for instance—that most people take for granted. She hopes to mentor other families, and knows that Ms. Marshall and her husband will help others as well. “It takes a team of people,” Ms. Martin said, “to stand by families in crisis and help get them back together again.”

Pastor Sunny Kang, from South Bay Presbyterian Church in Torrance, chairs the faith-based committee in the Torrance DCFS office. He was initially leery about becoming involved, and the committee began slowly, but now the partnership works hard to benefit five entities: DCFS, DCFS children, the community at large, the faith community, and community partners such as foundations and service agencies. In the last two months, six new churches and a mosque have joined. The committee focuses in three areas:

- Finding resource families, adoptive families, and foster families
- Finding mentors
- Encouraging members to provide preventive care to decrease referrals to DCFS

The last Saturday in June, an event was held to educate faith communities on how to recruit resource families. About 100 people from 50 or 60 different Muslim, Christian, and Jewish congregations attended, and already 15 or more want to establish programs. Other groups provide supportive services for families such as beds and cribs, and still others are experimenting with group mentoring with foster children. The time commitment of one-on-one mentoring is often too intense for those new to the concept, but various group programs have yielded dozens of people who are now willing to sign up to work with individual children. The 2007–2008 goal is to produce 200 mentors out of the Torrance office alone, as well as to expand into other communities.

Members of the faith community make rooms available as team decision-making conference sites, and connect families to individuals like Sandy Martin who are willing to “walk with others through life.” A women’s group made Mother’s Day baskets for women who have lost custody of their children. Pastor Kang’s own church’s youth group raised \$6,000 to host a sit-down Christmas dinner and party for foster teens last year, and other churches are lining up to do the same this year. As the county looks at visitation centers, the faith community is also eager to help there.

The faith community is the only cradle-to-grave presence in many people’s lives, Pastor Kang said, and DCFS children have incredible things to offer. “We want to be with them, empower them, help them become who they want to become,” he said. “I’m better off because I know these kids. It’s a privilege to be alongside them.” He thanked Harvey Kawasaki, former regional administrator in Torrance, for establishing the faith-based committee there, and commended current office leadership for continuing the effort.

Mr. Kawasaki briefly reviewed *A Simple Guide on Engaging Faith Communities in the Work of the L.A. County Commission for Children and Families: Lessons Learned from Major Players*, which quotes many people close to the Commission’s work and was prepared at the request of the faith-based committee by individuals at the USC Center for Religion and Civic Culture. He encouraged Commissioners to read the document thoroughly, since incorporating faith groups in the delivery and provision of services to children and families has tremendous potential.

- **Faith communities can change the status quo.** As Commissioner Murray mentions in the document, matching the 8,000 houses of worship in Southern California with the 20,000+ children in the foster care system could make a considerable dent.
- **The congregation acts like a family for those who have none.**
- **Houses of worship are an invaluable untapped source of knowledge and expertise.**

Identifying a point person within each congregation is important, as is using existing networks, especially those with political connections. Structuring focused meetings and reaching out to the entire breadth of diversity are also key considerations. Financial barriers can exist, but partnerships can help leverage dollars. (The upcoming Family Fun Day in the South Bay on September 15 leverages DCFS funds, for example, to provide a free day for the community where congregations staff a booth or provide activities for children and families, and talk to people about the services they offer.) An open discussion of not only what faith communities can do for DCFS but what they need from the department is also vital to effective and credible partnerships.

With the Commission's approval, Mr. Kawasaki would like to see the *Simple Guide* widely distributed to county managers, particularly in DCFS, Probation, the Department of Mental Health, and the Department of Public Social Services. Commissioner Franzen noted that juvenile court judges she has talked to are all for the involvement of faith-based communities, and some have even called directly for help with referrals.

Commissioners praised the idea of the document, but asked for the following changes:

- Revise the first paragraph to eliminate the suggestion that the Commission itself provides services, perhaps offering more background on the Commission and making clear that DCFS is the service-providing entity.
- More fully identify the individuals who are quoted.
- Address questions that might be raised about bringing religion into government, emphasizing that congregations are simply groups of people with a commitment to the wellness of the community and to building relationships with families.
- Add in some of the legal obligations that people working with foster children are subject to, even before undergoing any program-specific training—confidentiality restrictions, background checks, LiveScan clearances, etc.

Mr. Kawasaki promised that the committee would make the requested revisions, vet the document through County Counsel, and return to present the Commission with a final version prior to publishing.

He then called Commissioners' attention to the faith community collaboration survey instrument included in their packets. It was developed with the intention of distributing it to DCFS regional and unit managers (21 in all) as well as to Probation managers at another 15 locations, with the hope of 100 percent participation. The compilation of results will give both the committee and survey respondents information on barriers that offices encounter in working with the faith-based community and on mechanisms that can overcome those barriers. Although the Commission has not had great success in the past with surveys, Commissioners voiced no objections to its distribution, and suggested no revisions to the instrument.

Commissioner Worthy-Clayton brought up the two emphases on faith that exist within the Probation Department's work—the chaplains employed at probation facilities and the religious experiences that the department is mandated by law to provide to incarcerated youth. Chronic understaffing has meant that many youth are being denied the opportunity to attend religious services, which is a serious problem. In addition, when they *are* brought to services, the variety of religious experiences available to them is very small. These are issues separate from what the faith-based committee is now addressing, but Commissioner Worthy-Clayton believes they should be looked at.

DCFS HEALTH AND SAFETY SECTION/CHILD FATALITY UPDATE

Paul Buehler, risk management division chief, reported that a review of DCFS staff out on leave was done when the **health and safety section** was moved to his division in mid-May. Logs showed that 7.2 percent of all staff were on medical leave, but random checks of office rosters yielded much lower figures in many cases. (In Lancaster, for example, logs reported 6 percent of staff being out, when the actual number was 2.5 percent.) The flaw in the system lies with a lack of timeliness in regional administrators' completing forms, both when employees take leave and when they return to work. An office-by-office review by staff category is now being completed and compared with existing lists, and a new tracking method is being developed. People on leave are also being contacted and efforts made to persuade them to return, to reduce the overall percentage of employees on leave. By November, the division should have accurate data on the numbers of people out and what interventions are successful in getting them back on the job.

Medical limitations may prevent employees from returning to their former responsibilities, Mr. Buehler said, and some are out long enough that their positions are filled and they must fill other slots in the same category. Most return to their former jobs with temporary restrictions—reduced caseloads, or a prohibition against driving more than 50 miles a day, for example—that are in place for a 90-day period. If, after that time, a permanent and stationary medical condition prevents them from performing their former duties, other positions are sought.

With regard to employee mental health, Chair Kleinberg reported hearing about workers maneuvering the system for stress leave, and Mr. Buehler said that an interactive process has existed for the last year that has begun addressing those concerns, though it is taking time. A doctor's release is necessary for employees returning from leave, and a fitness-for-duty evaluation may also be performed if issues arise about an employee's mental and emotional ability to deal with the public.

From the audience, Danny Ramos from SEIU local 721 added his concerns about the severe understaffing of clerical support positions in some DCFS offices, and the increases in workload required by the point of engagement rollout, the expansion of team decision-making, and the requirement that social workers administer mental health assessments when they have not been trained as mental health clinicians. In the point of engagement agreement, DCFS committed to staffing the front end at 120 percent, but only three offices are at that level or above. Because of this shortfall, staff are beginning to leave,

and both quality of service and child safety are being compromised. Chair Kleinberg promised that the Commission would examine staffing issues at a future meeting.

Mr. Buehler then reviewed information from the **child fatality section**, in which a January 2007 assessment found:

- Many different logs, but no overall tracking system
- Significantly delayed 30- and 90-day reports
- No external systemic review process
- A significant delay in autopsy reports
- Limited communication between sections

Under his leadership, several changes have been made:

- A fatality log is updated weekly.
- The critical incident/fatality tracking (CIFT) system has been updated to track demographic information.
- As of the end of June, 30- and 90-day reports are caught up, and a monthly report tracks them.
- The section now works with the Inter-Agency Council on Child Abuse and Neglect (ICAN) to review large systemic issues such as noncounty-agency cooperation, legislation, and communication with medical facilities and their databases. (In one case, a child died after a lengthy wait for a Regional Centers placement, and Mr. Buehler said that discussions with Regional Centers are ongoing. If issues cannot be resolved locally, solutions may be sought at the state level.
- An internal child fatality roundtable reviews incidents where no significant child abuse history exists. Roundtable members include child fatality section staff, staff from the DCFS medical director's office, the risk management division chief, and County Counsel.
- For cases having a significant history with the department, intense reviews are conducted with case-carrying staff present.
- Supervisor Molina is working with the coroner's office to assign four additional staff to child fatalities, thereby speeding the release of autopsy findings.
- A systematic review of fatalities over the past three years has identified policy and practice issues as well as trends of the most consistently violated policies. That information has been incorporated into training for emergency response workers and is being developed for DCFS interns and the social workers' training academy.

As Mr. Buehler prepares to take a job in New York at the end of this month, he has developed several recommendations for the future:

- Maintain all logs and use the CIFT system for regular child fatality reports, broken out into categories and areas.
- Develop a team with the coroner, perhaps co-locating DCFS and coroner staff for improved communication, and increase staffing at the coroner's office.
- Develop an audit section to further review child fatality cases for violations of established practice and policy, referring them to the internal affairs section when necessary and formulating overall practice improvements.
- With the approval of County Counsel, Commissioners should consider attending the monthly child fatality roundtable to gain insight into the review process.

Commissioner Friedman praised Mr. Buehler for bringing order out of chaos, and seconded his recommendation that Commission members attend the monthly roundtable meetings. Ms. Ploehn extended the invitation, and Chair Kleinberg suggested that meeting notices be sent to the Commission office. Kimberly Foster, the Commission's executive director, will also coordinate the distribution to Commissioners of child fatality notices, which not everyone is now receiving.

On Mr. Buehler's departure, the logs and protocols that have been established will continue, but staffing is a key issue and resources for additional items do not exist. Supervisor Molina's push for extra staff at the coroner's office is a welcome one, since ICAN, which reviews all child fatalities, must often wait three to six months for individual coroner's reports. Summary reports from that office often take years to be released, so identified trends are all but useless. The supervisor's office is waiting to hear from the coroner before moving forward with the process, Mr. Buehler said, and the requested items may appear in September's revised budget. Chair Kleinberg suggested contacting Supervisor Molina's office to determine how the Commission can be helpful.

Although child deaths are most often gang-related, their second most likely cause is co-sleeping, when infants are crushed or smothered by intoxicated adults in the same bed. Commissioner Friedman asked if Commissioners might have access to the CIFT system on a read-only basis, to begin to informally identify further trends. Commissioner Biondi believes that the law does not protect the confidentiality of deceased children, and Mr. Buehler said that he saw no barriers to Commissioner access.

When Commissioners read cases about five years ago, their findings and recommendations to a former department director seemed to fall on deaf ears, Vice Chair Sorkin said, with the uniform response being that "a policy was in place." A log of fatalities is a good step, but policy and practice changes may also be necessary, as well as public education such as what First 5 LA is doing around the co-sleeping issue. ICAN's review may take up to a year, Commissioner Worthy-Clayton said, making internal roundtable reviews that much more important, since they don't need to wait for a coroner's report and can address situations in which policy recommendations have not been followed—a child being placed with relatives unaware of gang risks, for instance. Since many of the DCFS

children killed by gangs are AWOL, Commissioner Biondi suggested that the Commission ask for the Probation Department's monthly tracking of details on its AWOL youth, which number in the hundreds.

Mr. Buehler cited an example of how the roundtable process works, in a situation in which no abuse was suspected but the family had an open case. During an intensive case review, it was discovered that the dead child's mother had never received services or supports. The regional administrator was alerted, the mother received substance abuse and mental health assessments, and ongoing services are now being provided to the family and surviving siblings. Feedback to regional administrators is provided in the investigative piece of the roundtable's review, and line staff receive names of additional people they should contact about a family. If questions are pending in the roundtable's report, the case is put on the list for review the following month. In general, child fatality staff and Mr. Buehler himself read all cases, and a write-up is done by staff.

PUBLIC COMMENT

There was no public comment.

MEETING ADJOURNED