



**STATEMENT OF PROCEEDINGS
FOR THE REGULAR MEETING OF THE
LOS ANGELES COUNTY COMMISSION FOR
CHILDREN AND FAMILIES
KENNETH HAHN HALL OF ADMINISTRATION
500 WEST TEMPLE STREET, ROOM 739
LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA 90012
<http://ccf.lacounty.gov>**

Monday, April 3, 2017

10:00 AM

AUDIO FOR THE ENTIRE MEETING. (17-1603)

Attachments: [AUDIO](#)

Present: Commissioner Genevra Berger, Commissioner Carol O. Biondi, Commissioner Maria Brenes, Commissioner Candace Cooper, Commissioner Wendy Garen, Commissioner Sydney Kamlager, Commissioner Candace Allen Nafissi, Commissioner Wendelyn Nichols-Julien, Vice Chair Liz Seipel and Chair Jacquelyn McCroskey

Absent: Commissioner Patricia Curry, Commissioner Amy Howorth, Commissioner John Kim and Vice Chair Wendy B. Smith

I. ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS

1. Call to Order. (17-1505)

Chair McCroskey called the meeting to order at 10:01 a.m., noting a lack of quorum. Commissioner Brenes joined the meeting after it was called to order, establishing a quorum of members in attendance.

2. Introduction of meeting attendees. (17-1506)

Members of the public were invited to introduce themselves.

3. Approval of the minutes from the March 20, 2017 meeting. (17-1507)

On motion of Commissioner Nichols-Julien, seconded by Commissioner Cooper (Commissioners, Curry, Kim, and Vice Chair Smith being absent), this item was approved.

Attachments: [SUPPORTING DOCUMENT](#)

II. REPORTS

4. Chair's Report. (17-1508)

Chair McCroskey reported the following:

- **Chair McCroskey welcomed Commissioner Nafissi to the Commission and invited her to speak:**
 - o **Commissioner Nafissi indicated that she has been an early care and education advocate for approximately 10 years. She started in Assembly Member Ted Lieu's office, working with the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS), State licensing, and on other children's issues. Commissioner Nafissi gained program experience through work with the Early Head Start program. She is currently with the Los Angeles area Chamber of Commerce, where she advocates for additional investments in early care and education at the local, state, and national levels. She shared that she is the mother of two (2) children, and is excited to be a part of the Commission.**
- **Chair McCroskey clarified information that was provided as a public comment at the March 6, 2017 meeting. The public comment indicated that a parent had been recently detained by Immigration and Customs Enforcement at Children's Court. The Commission has since been advised that there was a misunderstanding; the detention was not recent and had actually occurred some time ago; and**
- **Chair McCroskey noted the recent events involving the criminal proceedings of the four social workers who have been charged with child abuse in association with the death of Gabriel Fernandez, and shared that during a recent class at the University of Southern California, where she teaches, social work students expressed concerns regarding these events. Tamara N. Hunter, Executive Director, was a guest speaker during this class, and shared that several students reported that they would not pursue employment with DCFS after graduation because of the criminal proceedings.**

Brandon Nichols, Acting Director, DCFS, noted that these events have significantly impacted the industry. Mr. Nichols stated that when the social workers were initially arrested, the DCFS Executive Team met with staff at the Palmdale DCFS office to discuss the events and the history of criminal prosecution in child welfare. This is the first time in the State of

California that something like this has happened.

Mr. Nichols stated that he and his team want staff to understand that this was an unusual case, hallmarked by a fundamental lack of doing the basic job. Mr. Nichols also confirmed that the detention rate, reunification rate and rate of calls to the Child Protection Hotline have been impacted by these events.

5. Report by Brandon Nichols, Acting Director, Department of Children and Family Services. (17-1509)

Brandon Nichols, Acting Director, DCFS reported the following:

- **Mr. Nichols testified on the Emergency Child Care Bridge Funding Program in Sacramento last week. He stated that it went well and many people came out to show support, including foster parents and adoptive parents. The funding request is for \$30 million, with the bulk being reserved for vouchers, a portion for navigators, and a smaller portion for trauma informed training for childcare providers;**
- **On March 31, 2017, the Department of Human Resources posted the vacancy notice for the DCFS Director position. The posting is not the typical vacancy notice, as it represents a vision for the Department. The County was originally going to work with an outside recruiting firm, but decided to utilize the County's recruiter instead; and**
- **The CEO's recent budget presentation was supportive of DCFS' request for 250 additional Children's Social Workers (CSW). This will bring caseloads down to 17-20 per CSW.**

III. PRESENTATIONS

6. Visitation

- Diane Iglesias, Senior Deputy Director, Government Accountability and Risk Management, DCFS
- Eva Reina, LCSW, Interim Executive Assistant, Office of the Director, DCFS
- Richard Cohen, Ph.D., Director, Project ABC
- Gail Bardin, Program Director, Family Connect Pasadena, All Saints Church Foster Care Project (17-1510)

Eva Reina, LCSW, Interim Executive Assistant, Office of the Director, DCFS, provided an overview of the Board motion on visitation, reviewed the DCFS March 2017 Visitation Report and reported the following:

The Board filed a motion in September 2016 directing DCFS to address significant issues regarding visitation. DCFS was directed to look into repurposing Human Services Aides (HSAs), visitation centers, and training coaches to improve visitation.

The Commission participated in meetings to develop the Department's approach to addressing visitation, and provided feedback that was included in the final report to the Board. She noted that Senior Deputy Director, Diane Iglesias, who is leading the work in this area, really wants to change the culture of visitation to make it a resource and a service, not an event.

DCFS proposes that each DCFS office have a dedicated Children Service Administrator (CSA) to act as an "air traffic controller" and coordinate the logistics associated with arranging visitation.

DCFS has also requested from the Board the option of releasing a Request for Proposal (RFP) for community based service providers to provide visitation coaching and training.

DCFS will be participating in a hackathon next month, and hopes to develop an application for assisting with visitation logistics. Ms. Reina reported that Mr. Nichols did an interview on visitation which generated a lot of attention; counties from east coast states have contacted DCFS expressing interest in the technology.

Ms. Reina stated that DCFS is hoping to create a system to use up front family finding to locate family and non relative extended family members who can provide visitation coaching, even if they cannot provide placement. She noted that once a case is closed, these coaches can continue to be there for the family and support reunification. Ms. Reina stated that this practice will improve safety, reunification rates, and staff morale.

In response to questions posed by Ms. Hunter regarding visitation centers in Compton being underutilized, Ms. Reina stated that although DCFS has developed visitation centers in some areas, the Department has struggled with maintaining them; there is no consistency and DCFS

does not have enough support staff. Ms. Reina indicated that there are a lot of people willing to volunteer, but DCFS does not have the manpower to provide orientations, training, and have them all live scan cleared. DCFS is hoping to revive visitation centers, under the supervision of the dedicated CSA, who would also be able to coordinate the support of community partners.

In response to questions posed by the Commission, Ms. Reina provided the following answers:

- Ms. Reina explained that the Court has resorted to issuing blanket visitation orders because DCFS does not always provide visitation recommendations. These blanket orders are typically for three (3) hours of visitation, three (3) times a week. Ms. Reina further explained that for every hour of visitation, it takes approximately one hour to coordinate. She noted that these orders are often difficult for parents to meet, and the system needs to be flexible to meet the needs of parents; and
- Issues associated with live scan clearance of community partners involve getting the volunteers to a location to have their fingerprints scanned. DCFS has the technology to receive the results quickly, but lacks the manpower to make it happen.

Ms. Reina commented on the benefits of having diverse stakeholders at the decision making table and noted that DCFS is in a much better place now.

The next steps for DCFS include:

1. Development of a Request For Information and RFP for community based service providers to assist with visitation;
2. Development of an app or technological product from Hackathon; and
3. Further development of the structure of this visitation initiative within DCFS.

Richard Cohen, Ph.D., Director, Project ABC, reported the following:

- Children ages zero to five who are in the child welfare system should be treated as special population because they have different developmental and mental health needs;

- **44% of children receiving visitation services are under age five (5); children under age five (5) are prone to stay in care for longer lengths, the average length of stay is over 12 months; they are more likely to be re detained; and disproportionality begins immediately over 26% of children under five (5) are African American;**
- **In the fiscal year 2013-14 it was reported that 95% of foster children who aged out of the system were known to the Department of Children and Family Services prior to the age of three;**
- **12.3% entered the system prior to five years of age;**
- **It is important to acknowledge that children in this age ranges who are removed from the home suffer from trauma;**
- **Removing a child affects their cognitive, psychological, neurological, social and emotional well-being; can create attachment issues; and they are more likely to have developmental disabilities;**
- **Visitation programs are critical to the well-being of children and must involve training in issues that children in these age ranges will encounter;**
- **Support and services for the coaches must also be included; and**
- **75% of children in these age ranges are in Foster Family Agencies (FFA), and FFAs must be partners in visitation.**

Gail Bardin, Program Director, Family Connect Pasadena, All Saints Church Foster Care Project, provided an overview of the project and reported the following:

- **At the request of DCFS the All Saints Church created a visitation program;**
- **All coaches receive a 24 hour training curriculum and are trained by Debra Davies from Friends of the Family;**
- **There are seven (7) visitation sites;**
- **Visitation rooms are filled with furniture, games, and toys;**

- **Parents and children have expressed their appreciation for the sites, and are encouraged to bring food;**
- **DCFS has extended their core practice model training to the coaches;**
- **The program encourages consistency in visitation days and times because there is emotional safety in routine;**
- **Each volunteer who accepts the assignment must provide an online report on the visit within three days;**
- **All visits, including missed visits, must be reported on a weekly basis;**
- **In effort to support and retain coach monitors, they hold social gatherings for them three times per year;**
- **All volunteers have been cleared and approved through DCFS; and**
- **The biggest challenge is to recruit, train and sustain volunteers; an influx of volunteers has been experienced since the 2016 presidential election.**

In response to questions posed by the Commission, Ms. Bardin responded to the following:

- **Volunteers always provide their services to the same families, consistency is key; and**
- **Cultural proficiency and self-awareness of racism trainings are provided to the coaches on a weekly basis. Ms. Reina added that DCFS is looking into creating training for all offices.**

Attachments: [SUPPORTING DOCUMENT](#)

IV. MISCELLANEOUS

- 7. Opportunity for members of the public to address the Commission on item(s) of interest that are within the jurisdiction of the Commission. (17-1511)**

No member of the public addressed the Commission.

8. Matters not posted on the agenda, to be discussed and (if requested) place on the agenda for action at a future meeting of the Commission, or matters requiring immediate action because of an emergency situation or where the need to take action arose subsequent to the posting of the agenda. (17-1512)

There were no matters presented.

9. Adjournment. (17-1513)

The meeting adjourned at 11:54 a.m.

Attachments: [DO NOT PUBLISH](#)