

MOTION BY SUPERVISORS KATHRYN BARGER
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Friends of the Children Los Angeles

Vulnerable youth require the support of Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) as well as other County departments, such as the Department of Mental Health (DMH), Department of Public Health (DPH), Department of Health Services, Office of Child Protection (OCP), Department of Probation, and philanthropic partners that commonly serve vulnerable children, youth, and their families. The Antelope Valley (AV) region is of particular focus for both the County and philanthropy, which has created a valuable opportunity for collaboration on the development and implementation of programs that effectively serve children and families in the AV. These new partnerships are vital to support the County’s goal to increase resources and support for vulnerable children, youth, and families in the AV.

The County has identified Friends of the Children Los Angeles (Friends L.A.) as a welcomed partner in serving the AV with its unique and proven longitudinal support of children and youth. The mission of Friends L.A. is to select children facing the highest risks and dedicate resources to them for their entire childhood to break the cycles of juvenile justice and child welfare systems involvement and generational poverty. They do this by matching youth and parents with a full time professional mentor known as a friend, from kindergarten through high school graduation, serving identified families for 12 or more years. Friends L.A. is in its second year of operation in Los Angeles County. During this time, the organization has committed to over 100 youth and caregivers in the 2nd and 4th Supervisorial Districts. In Metro and South Los Angeles, Friends L.A. has prioritized the children of foster youth alumni for enrollment in the program.

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With over 25-years of data, the national Friends of the Children program has demonstrated that the program is uniquely effective as an early intervention for youth who are at high risk of entering, or already experiencing foster care. Data demonstrates that youth in foster care paired with a friend have shorter lengths of stay and re-enter care less often than youth without a Friend. Families and caregivers of youth in the national Friends of the Children program report feeling better connected to resources, improved skills as advocates and parents, and stronger relationships with their children and their communities. Data shows that 83% of youth in the program graduate from high school (even though 60% of their parents didn't have the support they needed to graduate); 93% of youth avoid the juvenile justice system (even though more than 50% have a parent who was impacted by the criminal justice system); and 98% of youth avoid parenting as teens (even though 85% were born to a teen parent themselves). A return on investment study of the program showed a \$7 to \$1 return on investment, with \$900,000 savings to taxpayers for each program graduate. We expect similar outcomes among children and youth in the pilot with the local Friends L.A. program.

In support of the County's efforts to improve family stability and prevent foster care entry in the AV, DMH seeks to facilitate the expansion of Friends L.A. by funding them to serve 48 youth most at risk of abuse, neglect and/or entry into the foster care system. Friends L.A. will commit to these children and their families for 12+ years from kindergarten through high school graduation, by leveraging county investments with philanthropic funds. The goal of this partnership will be to improve the experience and outcomes for youth in the foster care system. DMH will be working closely with Friends L.A. to develop meaningful outcome measures, which satisfy the requirements of the funding source and include input from the community.

WE, THEREFORE, MOVE that the Board of Supervisors:

1. Delegate authority to the Director of the Department of Mental Health to enter into an agreement with Friends of the Children Los Angeles to implement a pilot project in the Antelope Valley for a total term of three fiscal years with funds up to \$2.12 million dollars. The agreement, which will incorporate the child selection process, will support the development and implementation of a professional mentoring model that will enhance supports for the children in the Antelope Valley that are most at risk for abuse or neglect;
2. Delegate authority to the Director of the Department of Mental Health to execute amendments to this contract as needed to accommodate unanticipated program needs and increase the maximum contract sum by 20% to accommodate any unanticipated increase or scope of services to be provided; and
3. Direct the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) and the Department of Mental Health (DMH) to finalize the process to identify children who would benefit the most from the program and report back to the Board in 60 days with selection criteria and a comprehensive update.

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