

AGN. NO. _____

MOTION BY SUPERVISORS KATHRYN BARGER
AND JANICE HAHN

MAY 17, 2022

COORDINATING FAITH-BASED OUTREACH BY COUNTY DEPARTMENTS

The County of Los Angeles has engaged with a variety of faith-based organizations and houses of worship in a shared goal of serving vulnerable populations in need. Over the years, the County has partnered with these faith groups to share vital information and resources to support public health, homelessness, foster youth, and more.

Traditionally, this outreach has been established and organized by individual departments and agencies, such as the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS), the Department of Health Services (DHS), the Department of Public Health (DPH), and the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA) that have built relationships with faith-based organizations (FBOs) and houses of worship to create advisory boards, develop community programs, and conduct staff outreach.

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DCFS has worked with the faith-based community for many years. On September 25, 2018, the Board voted on a motion authored by Supervisor Barger to direct the Center for Strategic Partnerships and DCFS to develop a coordinated Faith-Based engagement strategy and program, including exploring hiring a faith-based consultant in partnership with philanthropy, develop measures and data collection methods, and explore creating a centralized faith-based section within DCFS. As of today, two of those three directives have been met, with remaining work needed in identifying measurements and data collection methods.

More recently, on September 1, 2020, DCFS signed a non-financial partnership agreement with CarePortal, a technology platform used to mobilize faith-based organizations to connect, respond, and meet identified needs of DCFS children and families. The CarePortal project has been launched in 11 regional offices in Service Planning Areas (SPA) 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, and 8 and is on schedule to roll out to the remaining SPAs during 2022. Since the creation of this program, families and youth have received various support stemming from donations from connected churches and houses of worship including beds for young people being placed with a relative caregiver, the payment of water or phone bills for the new extended family, and more. These supports are crucial to ensuring the stability of the foster youth placement. Other departments that have reached out to the faith community are DPH and the DHS.

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Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, DPH and DHS relied heavily on the faith-based community to share information and increase access to personal protective equipment (PPE), testing, and vaccinations. DPH realized that to successfully reach our most under-serviced populations, it was incumbent on the County to cultivate partnerships with the most trusted and well-connected organizations. Each week, DPH sent out hundreds of mobile vaccination teams, many of which operated at houses of worship, or partnered with churches to invite their congregation. The County regularly had testing and vaccination sites established at houses of worship and coordinated with leaders in the faith communities to promote the effort. Partnering with the faith-based community provided us access to the most reliable community leaders and venues. Residents trusted their faith leaders and felt comfortable accessing critical services at their place of worship.

Additionally, there are numerous FBOs throughout Los Angeles County that provide services to people experiencing homelessness, ranging from a broad spectrum: food pantries to showers and shelter, and support organizations that cater to the needs of low socio-economic communities and homeless populations. The intent of LAHSA's Faith Working Group is to create a collaborative response to homelessness. With a long history of serving people experiencing homelessness, FBOs serve those in need, which is a tangible and achievable endeavor because of their existing access to resources and knowledge of navigating through the homeless services landscape.

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Some of these organizations can navigate resources and systems, but others operate from a servant's heart with limited tools to serve those in need.

On January 5, 2021, the Board passed "Promoting Faith Community Involvement in the Countywide Movement to Prevent and Combat Homelessness." This motion directed a consultant to conduct a countywide survey of faith-based organizations who have worked on addressing homelessness, and to identify from the results of the survey what capacity building and development supports are essential, financial, and structural barriers that exist for these FBOs, and identify financial supports. The motion also asks the consultant to make recommendations on the creation of a County Faith Commission on Homelessness. While this effort is focused on the surveying of FBOs specifically related to their work on homelessness policies and outreach, it highlights that although work is being done across the county, in many ways, it is work that is siloed by department.

These are just some of many wonderful examples of our County departments proactively outreaching to our faith-based community and houses of worship. Given the traditional department outreach plan may not be aware of similar or conflicting requests from other County departments, it is incumbent to establish a centralized-outreach plan so that houses of worship and faith-based organizations do not feel overwhelmed with non-financial requests for support at a time many houses of worship are seeing declining donations due to the County closure of houses of worship as part of the Health Officer Orders during the beginning of COVID-19.

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Creating a coordinated faith-based council that can serve as a lead commission for all County departments can help to ensure that our houses of worship and faith-based communities and organizations are not overwhelmed and help to educate our departments on best ways to engage with these organizations. Additionally, exploring whether financial stipends or grants could be given to these organizations could help to infuse funds into community-based programs in underserved communities.

WE, THEREFORE, MOVE that the Board of Supervisors instruct the Chief Executive Officer (CEO), in consultation with the Center for Strategic Partnerships, representatives from DCFS, DPSS, Homeless Initiative, LAHSA, Probation, DHS, Department of Mental Health (DH), and DPH, representatives from houses of worship and faith-based organizations identified from each Supervisorial District (maximum two per district), and representatives from philanthropy, to assess existing needs and opportunities for the County to develop a robust and comprehensive partnership with faith-based organizations to serve the most vulnerable including people experiencing homelessness, families involved in the child welfare system, at-risk youth, low-income families, isolated older adults, and others.

- a. To complete this assessment, CEO should:
 - i. Convene townhalls and listening sessions in each Supervisorial District in order to identify best practices to work with faith-based organizations and houses of worship as well as possible obstacles to partnering.

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- ii. Review best practices that have worked in other jurisdictions; and
 - iii. Assess existing programs interacting with faith-based organizations housed in County departments and agencies as well as past County best practices, to determine areas of strength and weakness.
 - iv. Delegate authority to the CEO to hire consultants as necessary to complete the abovementioned directives.
- b. The CEO should report back to the Board in six months on how the County can build a permanent, coordinated faith-based partnership program and include recommendations that ensure its success and sustainability. The report back should also identify potential funding through philanthropic or other means that could be used to provide grants to faith-based organizations or houses of worship for their assistance with County programs, such as hosting adoption fairs, providing space for safe visitations amongst parents and foster youth, and more.

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