County of Los Angeles
DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SOCIAL SERVICES
12860 CROSSROADS PARKWAY SOUTH • CITY OF INDUSTRY, CALIFORNIA 91746
Tel (562) 908-8400 • Fax (562) 908-0459

BRYCE YOKOMIZO
Director

LISA NUÑEZ
Chief Deputy

Board of Supervisors
GLORIA MOLINA
First District

YVONNE B. BURKE
Second District

ZEV YAROSLAVSKY
Third District

DON KNABE
Fourth District

MICHAEL D. ANTONOVICH
Fifth District

August 30, 2006

TO: Each Supervisor

FROM: Bryce Yokomizo, Director

SUBJECT: LOS ANGELES HOMELESS SERVICES AUTHORITY FEASIBILITY REPORT

On June 27, 2006, your Board instructed the Director of Public Social Services to work in collaboration with the Directors of Children and Family Services, Mental Health, Health Services, the Chief Administrative Officer and Auditor-Controller to:

- Conduct a feasibility study to determine what, if any, services can be moved from the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA) to a County department;
- Work with LAHSA to create a streamlined invoice and payment process to quickly verify eligibility status for clients transitioning into permanent housing;
- Develop a more comprehensive tracking system of CalWORKs homeless families who are placed in shelters, homeless family housing programs, emergency shelters, transitional and permanent housing; and
- Report back within 60 days with the results of the feasibility study and the progress made in each of the other areas.

This is to report the outcome and recommendations of our feasibility study, our progress in improving the administration of outreach and emergency shelter services, and our progress in developing a more comprehensive tracking system of CalWORKs homeless families.

Feasibility Study

Representatives from the Departments of Public Social Services (DPSS), Children and Family Services (DCFS), Mental Health (DMH), Department of Public Health (DPH – formerly part of Department of Health Services), the Chief Administrative Office (CAO), and the Auditor-Controller (A-C), as well as LAHSA, met twice to discuss whether any

or all of the services provided by LAHSA under the Outreach Emergency Shelter Services (OESS) contract with DPSS could be assumed by a County department. Additionally, DPSS and the Auditor-Controller met with LAHSA and its sub-contractors to discuss ways of improving the invoice and payment process, the eligibility verification process, and more comprehensive tracking of CalWORKs homeless families who are placed in housing programs, emergency shelters, and transitional and/or permanent housing.

LAHSA's Role on The Skid Row Outreach Team

A major component of the OESS contract has been the leadership, guidance, and participation by LAHSA in the Skid Row Outreach Team (SROT). Since the program's inception in February 2005, LAHSA staff led DMH and DCFS staff in roving the streets of Skid Row in search of homeless families who may need shelter or other services. Families in need of shelter or services were referred to DPSS staff collocated at the Weingart Access Center. DPSS staff joined the SROT as of October 20, 2005. In addition, DPH staff has been available to the team on an "on-call" basis to provide health-related services.

In addition, LAHSA assists homeless families in obtaining needed services, sometimes transporting the families to meet with DPSS staff collocated at the Midnight Mission, Union Rescue Mission, and the Weingart Center.

Throughout this process, LAHSA staff has, because of their extensive experience in working with the homeless, provided invaluable guidance and training to County staff. The focus of the SROT has, however, evolved since February 2005 from an outreach team to a family services needs assessment team, moving away from LAHSA's area of expertise.

***Recommendation**: LAHSA and the County departments agree that it is appropriate for LAHSA staff to leave the SROT. DCFS, DPSS, DMH and DPH will continue to staff the SROT, with DCFS in the lead, and this team will continue to rove the streets of Skid Row providing family services needs assessments and child safety assessments for all homeless families encountered. The team will also continue to connect homeless families with needed services.*

Transportation

As a part of the outreach services provided in the OESS contract, LAHSA has also transported families to the Metro Family DPSS office and to shelters or hotels/motels when public transportation cannot be used. The instances when LAHSA is needed to transport families are infrequent, averaging about five times per month.

***Recommendation**: Beyond Shelter, a private non-profit agency working with Skid Row families, has agreed to provide these transportation services, at no cost to DPSS. LAHSA is in agreement with this arrangement.*

Emergency Shelter Services Program

In addition to outreach services, through the OESS contract, LAHSA administers the Emergency Shelter Services Program on behalf of DPSS. The Emergency Shelter Services Program provides up to 120 days of shelter for eligible CalWORKs Welfare-to-Work families, along with the case management necessary to move them into either long-term transitional or permanent housing. To accomplish this, LAHSA sub-contracts with seven social services agencies throughout the County.

Families enter the Emergency Shelter Services Program in a variety of ways. Although some families enter as a result of their interaction with the SROT, many, if not most, are referred by the Homeless CalWORKs Families Project (HCFP) staff, DPSS Homeless Case Managers or public and private social service agencies, and some families have their first contact directly with LAHSA's sub-contracted agencies. When contacted to assist in identifying available shelter services for a homeless family, LAHSA first determines if they are a CalWORKs Welfare-to-Work family that may be eligible to the Emergency Shelter Services Program. If the family is eligible, LAHSA proceeds to work with the family and their sub-contracted agencies to identify suitable shelter for the family. Many families, however, are not eligible for the Emergency Shelter Services Program and once a family is determined to be ineligible for the program, LAHSA staff will assist the family in accessing alternative shelter, whenever possible, through their extensive network of resources throughout the County.

***Recommendation**: Given LAHSA's connection to emergency housing resources, both public and private, countywide, all County departments and LAHSA agree that to move administration of the Emergency Shelter Services Program to a County department would fragment emergency housing services to homeless families, and that administration of the Emergency Shelter Services Program should remain with LAHSA.*

Create a Streamlined Invoice and Payment Process

Representatives from LAHSA, their sub-contractors, the Auditor-Controller, and DPSS met to discuss ways to streamline the eligibility verification, invoice, and payment systems for the Emergency Shelter Services Program. All sub-contractors, LAHSA and DPSS agree that there have been some problems with verification, invoicing and payments in the past.

Status: Recent activities to improve the administration of the program have been implemented and the system is now working smoothly. These activities include training for LAHSA staff on how to verify eligibility via the DPSS Welfare-to-Work computer system (GEARS), and training for sub-contractors on what documentation is required by LAHSA and DPSS with their invoices. DPSS is also developing a simplified GEARS screen that will be used by LAHSA to more quickly determine eligibility. The target date for availability of this simplified screen is September 2006. DPSS will provide training for LAHSA staff once the new GEARS screen is available and will continue to monitor the verification, invoicing and payment processes to quickly identify and resolve any issues that may surface in the future.

Develop a More Comprehensive Tracking System of CalWORKs Homeless Families

LAHSA's sub-contractors currently gather data regarding the families they serve. They regularly report on the number of families and the outcomes for those families they assist with transitional or permanent housing. No data is captured, however, for those families who exit the program without finding housing, either because they have exhausted their eligibility to the program or because they have elected to exit the program even though they continue to be eligible.

***Status**: The sub-contractors have agreed to capture and report the reasons families leave the program while still eligible, as well as the barriers families face that are not able to find housing even though the contracted agency has worked with the families the full 120 days of the Emergency Shelter Services Program. The reporting will begin September 1, 2006.*

Conclusion

All County departments and LAHSA concur with the findings and recommendations of this report. Beginning September 1, 2006, LAHSA staff will cease their participation with the SROT and providing transportation to CalWORKs homeless families on Skid Row. Therefore, DPSS will amend the LAHSA OESS contract to remove LAHSA SROT staff, transportation and $105,255 in related costs for September 2006 – June 2007, when the contract expires.

BY:cl

c: Executive Officer, Board of Supervisors
Chief Administrative Officer
Auditor-Controller
County Counsel