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April 11, 2007

To: Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky, Chairman
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From: Patricia S. Ploehn, LCSW
Director

FEBRUARY 13, 2007, BOARD AGENDA ITEM #11: ADOPTION AND SAFE FAMILIES ACT (ASFA) HOME ASSESSMENTS

At the February 13, 2007, Board meeting, the Board instructed the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) to:

Work in coordination with the Chief Administrative Office and the Auditor Controller (A-C) and report back in 30 days on the following:

1. A full scope review of the issues impacting the Department's ability to conduct both initial and annual Adoption and Safe Families Act home inspections in a timely manner.
2. A comprehensive plan, including performance measures that will effectively address the problem.
3. A "Prop A" review of the ASFA functions and an assessment as to the feasibility and cost effectiveness of contracting this function out.

REVIEW

In 1999, the State of California enacted AB 2773 to implement the provisions of the Federal Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) of 1997 (H.R.867-Public Law 105-89). In addition to other provisions to promote safety and permanence for children in foster care, ASFA requires that a common standard be used to assess and approve both relative and non-relative caregivers. That is, prior to receiving federal foster care funds, relative and non-relative extended family members would now need to meet the same standards as state-licensed foster homes.

On September 27, 2000, the State implemented the AFSA regulations related to relative and non-related extended family members. At that time, there were already thousands of children in relative care in Los Angeles County, with new relative child placements being made every day. While the Department has made significant strides in assessing both the homes of children placed before ASFA guidelines were established and children subsequently placed in relative and extended family member homes, we have recently gathered data that will enhance our efforts to complete all initial assessments and annual reassessments in a more timely manner.

The State standards for home approval include: Criminal Records/Prior Abuse Clearance; Caregiver Qualifications/Suitability; Providing Information on Child's Personal Rights; Caregiver Orientation and Training; and, Safety of Buildings and Grounds. When all five standards are met and documented, a Standards Met Date is established for the caregiver. A home assessment must be initiated within 30 days of a child's placement and re-assessed once annually thereafter. In addition to having to meet these State standards, the child must also meet other general federal eligibility requirements that include, but are not limited to, residence, income, and deprivation in the month that the petition was filed. Relative caregivers awaiting the completion of their initial or annual home (re)assessments may receive assistance through the CalWORKs program. Non-relative extended family members awaiting the completion of these assessments may receive General Relief Ineligible (GRI) payments. Unfortunately, GRI out-of-home care payments are costs that are ineligible for federal/State reimbursement, and are funded using all County monies. Therefore, it is important the Department continue to increase the number of timely completion of (re)assessments to minimize the use of County funding for placement costs that can be funded using primarily federal and State funding.

In October 2004, we identified the children for whom federal foster care funds could not be claimed due to overdue assessments or reassessments. Many of these families began to receive County-funded GRI payments in place of the foster care payments. This brought to light thousands of children that were in homes with overdue initial and annual assessments. Over the past two years, several "clean-ups" were attempted to provide timely assessments for all of these children. These past clean-up efforts were only partially successful, so in November 2006 we began an effort that will finally lead to the completion of remaining overdue assessments and ensure a system designed to prevent future delinquent assessments. This effort is detailed in the attached Comprehensive Plan.

SUMMARY OF CURRENT PLAN

In November 2006, our Revenue Enhancement Division Chief led a special project to identify the children whose caregivers were receiving GRI payments due to untimely reassessments. Just over 2,000 children were identified on the GRI payroll reports for the months September 2006 through December 2006. This effort resulted in the completion of hundreds of overdue annual assessments and a reduction of the child count on these GRI payrolls from 2,018 to 256 and a reduction in our monthly GRI costs from $917,305 to $549,093 as of March 2007. While we expect the monthly GRI costs to reduce further, there are some unavoidable circumstances where we will continue to pay placement costs utilizing GRI funds, such as for

children ordered by the court to remain in homes previously identified as not meeting ASFA standards, and for foster youth over 18 years of age.

Presently, there are approximately 10,868 children in relative and non-relative extended family member homes, and about 3,000 children in legal guardian homes for an approximate total of 14,000 children in homes requiring ASFA assessments. Of this population, 3,200 are in need of initial or annual (re)assessments, i.e. those that are overdue. We also perform approximately 700 initial assessments and 600 annual reassessments every month.

Issues affecting our ability to conduct timely assessments along with steps taken to address those issues are discussed in the attached Comprehensive Plan. In summary, the plan to complete the final 3,200 (re)assessments includes:

- In January 2007:
  - A series of office-based trainings for social workers and County Counsel attorneys was initiated to enhance awareness of current policy and procedure updates in the home approval process.
  - A new protocol was established requiring the Supervisor of the case-carrying social worker to review and approve all home assessment requests prior to the submission of the request to Kinship Support.
  - A quick reference protocol guide was developed for case-carrying social workers to expedite the home approval process.
  - A Caregiver Checklist was created to help caregivers prepare for the upcoming assessment.
- In February 2007, the Kinship Support/DCFS Lakewood office pilot was implemented. A main feature of the pilot was the co-location of a Kinship supervisor in the Lakewood office, which allows social workers to submit their home assessment requests in-person to the Kinship supervisor.
- In April 2007, the Kinship Support Division and the DCFS Bureau of Information Services developed a comprehensive report showing the assessment status of all 14,000 children in relative care.
- In April 2007, we initiated a Department-wide effort where the Kinship Support Division and each of the 18 Service Bureau offices will be responsible for ensuring overdue assessments in their Service Bureau office are completed by the target date of June 30, 2007.

We have determined following implementation of the above process improvements and upon completion of all overdue assessments, the current staffing of the Kinship Support Division will be sufficient to complete assessments in a timely manner and keep pace with the ongoing ASFA workload.

PROP A ANALYSIS

The Department has been working in collaboration with the A-C to determine the cost effectiveness of contracting out the ASFA relative home assessment functions. The A-C is in the process of calculating the County's avoidable cost based on staffing and cost information. The A-C also contacted a number of jurisdictions throughout the State requesting cost information related to contracting out the ASFA functions. However, none of the jurisdictions contacted contract out the ASFA functions.

The DCFS and A-C are working with Association of Community Human Service Agencies (ACHSA) to determine a cost that contractors would charge to provide ASFA related services. ACHSA members include foster family agencies that provide some of the same types of services for licensed foster family agencies that would be included in the ASFA relative home assessments.

Once ACHSA provides the contracted cost information, the A-C will finalize a cost analysis for each of the following three options:

- Contracting out relative home building and ground site inspections;
- Contracting out relative home building and ground site inspections and criminal records/ prior abuse clearance;
- Contracting out all ASFA functions except the final determination of whether or not to place the child in the home.

The A-C estimates completing the cost analysis and reporting the results to the Board by April 30, 2007.

The Department remains committed to the goal of ensuring the timely assessments of relative and non-relative extended family member homes. Each of the performance measures discussed in the Comprehensive Plan will result in increased safety for children placed with relative and non-relative extended family member caregivers; ensure timely approval of initial and annual assessments; and reduce the expenditure of County revenue.

Should you have any further questions, please call me at (213) 351-5600 or your staff may contact Armand Montiel, Board Liaison, at (213) 351-5530.

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Attachment

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

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN TO COMPLETE TIMELY INITIAL AND ANNUAL ADOPTION AND SAFE FAMILY ACT (ASFA) ASSESSMENTS

Introduction

The managers from the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) Kinship Support Division, Revenue Enhancement Division, Bureau of Information Services and Service Bureau offices are working in collaboration to eliminate the backlog of 3,200 children that are overdue for an initial assessment or annual reassessment.

Prior to the completion of the home assessment, the Service Bureau case-carrying Children's Social Worker has the discretion to place the child in the home of a relative or non-relative extended family member after a home safety inspection, completion of criminal background clearances (Child Abuse Central Index and California Law Enforcement Telecommunications System), and a child welfare history search. Children may remain in these homes provided a clean criminal clearance (i.e., no offense greater than a minor traffic violation) has been received on the adults and older youth living in the home, and a social worker has documented that the child can be appropriately cared for in the home. The case-carrying social worker is required to visit the child monthly regardless of the home assessment status.

The Kinship Support Division is responsible for conducting the home assessments. There are currently 77 social workers allocated for initial home assessments and annual reassessments.

Progress

In September 2006, the Department convened a work flow analysis workgroup to review the factors contributing to untimely home assessments, to formulate specific countermeasures, and implement strategies to effectively manage the assigned staff to complete both initial and annual home assessments. As a result of this analysis, we took the following actions:

- In November 2006, Revenue Enhancement's Division Chief led a special project to reduce the number of caregivers receiving General Relief Ineligible (GRI) payments for children due to overdue annual reassessments. There were approximately 2,018 children identified in this category in the GRI payroll reports for the months of September 2006 through December 2006. As of March 30, 2007, the number has been reduced to 256.

- In January 2007:
  - A series of office-based trainings for social workers and County Counsel attorneys was initiated to enhance awareness of current policy and procedure updates in the home approval process. The training addresses delays caused by incomplete initial home assessment request packets submitted to Kinship Support by social workers. To date, 17 of 19 DCFS offices have received training. All offices will be trained by April 30, 2007.

- A new protocol was established requiring the Supervisor of the case-carrying social worker to review and approve all home assessment requests prior to the submission of the request to Kinship Support. This, too, is to ensure that packets are completed correctly the first time to avoid delays.

- A quick reference protocol guide was developed for case-carrying social workers to use at the initial investigation and subsequent temporary placement. This guide provides "at a glance" information on the process required to complete a Temporary Placement and action items necessary to initiate the Kinship Home Assessment Request and Criminal Exemption Waiver. The use of this guide by the placing social worker expedites the home approval process.

- A Caregiver Checklist was created containing ASFA regulatory items for both the initial and annual home assessments to assist the caregivers in preparation for the upcoming assessment. The Caregiver Checklist has been distributed to the Service Bureaus during the Kinship Support office-based trainings and is distributed to the caregivers in the Caregiver Packets provided at the initial home assessments. In February 2007, we began mailing the Checklist to caregivers two months prior to the due date of their annual assessment.

- In February 2007, the Kinship Support/DCFS Lakewood office pilot was implemented. The Lakewood office was chosen as the pilot location as it has the largest child caseload. The main feature of the pilot was the co-location of a Kinship supervisor in the Lakewood office. This has allowed Lakewood office social workers to submit their home assessment requests in-person to the Kinship supervisor. Presently, other Service Bureau offices must route referrals to one central Kinship intake desk outside of the Service Bureau office. The pilot has created a unified work environment with increased communication and accountability; shortened the timeframe from receipt of request to the initiation of the home assessment; and, enhanced the workflow between Kinship Support and the Service Bureau office, which has resulted in more timely home approvals. Starting in May 2007, this pilot will expand to other offices and will include the co-location of Kinship units in each of the Service Bureau offices.

- The Kinship Support Regional Administrator continues to meet on a regular basis with the DCFS Interstate Compact for the Placement of Children (ICPC) Manager to find solutions for expediting the retrieval of foster care licenses from caregivers in other states. Because we have many children placed with relatives in other States, special tracking and processing is necessary to ensure that those placements meet ASFA standards.

- In April 2007, the Kinship Support Division and the DCFS Bureau of Information Services developed a comprehensive reporting tool addressing the status of all children in relative

care by aid code, type of home (e.g., relative or guardian), and category (e.g., 18 and over, ICPC, other) in the following areas:

- Completed home assessments;
- Pending home assessments;
- Home assessments with pending corrective action plan;
- Denied home assessments;
- Appropriate home assessment documentation; and,
- GRI cases with corresponding reason codes for County funding.

In addition to the reporting tools, the Bureau of Information Services will procure the services of a document imaging and workflow process consultant. This consultant will develop an imaging system that will track the ASFA referral and approval process from initiation of the referrals in the Service Bureau office to the Kinship Support Division for certification and ultimately to the Revenue Enhancement Division for ensuring proper payments to relatives and guardians. The system will streamline and automate the current manual paper driven process to ensure thorough completion of data and accurate documentation throughout the process, resulting in timelier ASFA approvals and recertifications. The development of this project is estimated for four months from the time a vendor is selected in May. The system is targeted for completion by September 2007.

- In April 2007, as part of the effort to complete all overdue assessments by June 30, 2007, all children needing initial and annual assessments were identified according to their assigned Service Bureau office. Each Service Bureau Regional Administrator is identifying social workers under their management to receive assessment training from Kinship Support services and participate in this Countywide effort to complete the assessments. Only social workers able to maintain up-to-date management of their own child welfare caseloads may participate in this effort. Each Regional Administrator will be responsible for ensuring overdue assessments in their Service Bureau office are completed by the target date. Also, the Service Bureau offices with the higher concentrations of out-of-home kinship placements and corresponding highest number of overdue assessments, will receive additional assistance from the Kinship Support Division. Progress on completion of the remaining overdue assessments will be monitored on a weekly basis.

We have determined following implementation of the above process improvements and upon completion of all overdue assessments, the current staffing of the Kinship Support Division will be sufficient to complete assessments in a timely manner and keep pace with the ongoing ASFA workload.

Performance Measures

The Department has established the following performance measures for the future completion of ASFA assessments and re-assessments:

- 90% of the initial home assessments to be initiated within 7 days after receiving the referrals from the case carrying social workers.
- 60% of the initial home assessments to be completed within 30 days after receiving the referrals.
- 35% of the remaining initial home assessments to be completed within 60 days after receiving the referrals.
- 95% of the annual reassessments to be completed prior to the annual assessment due date.

These performance measures will be tracked on a monthly basis to ensure standards are met.

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