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August 8, 2007

To: Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky, Chairman
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From: William T Fujioka
Chief Executive Officer

Duane Dennis, Chair
Policy Roundtable for Child Care

RESPONSE TO MAY 15, 2007 MOTION RELATED TO CHILD CARE SERVICES

On May 15, 2007, your Board adopted a motion instructing the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) to work with the Policy Roundtable for Child Care (Roundtable) and the Director of the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) to:

- Explore mechanisms to increase the pool of child care providers who are trained to work with families involved with, or at risk of involvement with the child welfare system; and

- Provide recommendations on how to encourage foster parents and relative caregivers to use free or subsidized child care services such as State Preschool, Head Start, and Los Angeles Universal Preschool (LAUP).

This document provides the combined response from the Roundtable, DCFS, and CEO.

Efforts to Increase the Pool of Trained Child Care Providers

During the 2007-08 Fiscal Year, the CEO's Office of Child Care will be sponsoring a variety of training opportunities for child care providers.

These training opportunities will be directly related to components of the child care quality rating system known as the Steps to Excellence Project (STEP), and will be supported by a one-time only contract with the California Department of Education, Child Development Division (CDE/CDD). Among the trainings to be offered, will be five, ten-day training sessions using the Preventing Child Abuse and Neglect (PCAN) curriculum developed by Zero to Three, a 30-year old national nonprofit multidisciplinary organization that informs, educates, and supports adults who influence the lives of infants and toddlers. Building on the work of the Center for the Study of Social Policy, the PCAN curriculum identifies strategies by which programs can foster the "protective factors" known to be correlated to reducing the risk for child abuse and neglect:

- Parental resilience;
- Social connections;
- Knowledge of parenting and child development;
- Concrete support in times of need; and
- Social and emotional competence of children.

The PCAN curriculum is designed specifically for work with child care staff and focuses on three overarching areas:

- Developing effective relationships with parents and their very young children;
- Understanding the impact of abuse and neglect on infants and toddlers; and
- Helping directors build workplaces that support staff's efforts to reduce the risk for child maltreatment.

I am very pleased to report that DCFS is researching their ability to use a portion of their CDE/CDD funding to continue the PCAN training during Fiscal Years 2008-09 and 2009-10. The Roundtable will report the final outcome of this request in the quarterly STEP report due to your Board on or before October 12, 2007. In addition, the Roundtable and DCFS will explore opportunities to collaborate on training related use of developmental screening tools.

Encouraging the Use of Subsidized Child Care Services

The use of high quality child development programs can provide a range of benefits for children and families involved in the child welfare system. The following are specific findings in this regard:

- "All infants in foster care and their caregivers can benefit from early childhood programs. High quality early childhood programs provide more than respite and child care for caregivers. They can enhance the well-being of infants in foster care by linking them to health and entitlement programs, create an additional opportunity for the infant to establish a stable relationship with a caring adult, and promote early learning," (*Ensuring the Healthy Development of Infants in Foster Care,* January 2004, Zero to Three, www.zerotothree.org).

- "High quality early education is critical to prepare children to succeed in kindergarten and beyond. Research shows that high quality early education can particularly benefit low-income children and those most at risk of school failure by supporting their healthy development across a range of measures," (*Reaching All Children?* 2006, CLASP, www.clasp.org).

It is important to note, however, the following caveats regarding child development programs for children in the child welfare system:

- Experience in poor quality child development programs does not produce the same positive child outcomes as participation in high quality programs. A recent national study revealed that fewer than ten percent of child care arrangements were rated as providing very high quality care. Eight percent were estimated to provide children with very low quality experiences. The majority fell between good and poor, (*National Institute of Health, National Institute of Child Health and Human Development*, October 3, 2006). These results mirror earlier findings which included participants from Los Angeles County (*Cost, Quality and Child Outcome in Child Care Centers Public Report*, 1995).

- Young children should be given the opportunity to develop trusting relationships with their foster parent or relative caregiver before entering a child care setting. Once enrolled in the child care setting, a concerted effort should be made to maintain the child's participation in that program and the relationships established by the child with peers and adults.

A number of efforts to promote the use of child care and development services by foster parents and relative caregivers have been attempted in the recent past. For the past three years, the Office of Child Care has distributed information on State Preschool, Head Start and more recently, LAUP services to DCFS Regional Administrators. The Education

Coordinating Council (ECC) has facilitated conversations with DCFS staff and representatives of child care and development service providers. DCFS staff has been charged with researching available funding streams to promote enrollment of children in preschool programs.

Challenges to Accessing Care

Two major obstacles impede the consistent utilization of high quality child care and development services by foster parents and relative caregivers.

- First of all, competition for subsidized child care services is fierce. Currently there are over 60,000 income eligible children with a need for child development services on the Los Angeles Centralized Eligibility List. The majority of these children are in need of full-day child development services because their parents are employed or seeking employment.

  The CDE/CDD is a major funding source for subsidized child care and development services and children who are determined to be at risk for abuse, neglect, or exploitation have priority for enrollment in CDE/CDD subsidized child care services, including children who have been removed from their homes and placed with relative caregivers. However, CDE/CDD has determined that children who have been placed in non-relative foster care are no longer at risk of abuse or neglect. As a result, these children do not have priority for enrollment in CDE/CDD funded services. National research has documented that close to 80 percent of very young children in the child welfare system were prenatally exposed to substance abuse, more than 50 percent have developmental delays or disabilities, and nearly 40 percent were born with low birth weights or prematurely, (*Ensuring the Healthy Development of Infants in Foster Care* by Sheryl Dicker, Elysa Gordon, 2004, Zero to Three, www.zerotothree.org/policy). While the risk of abuse or neglect should be eliminated by placing a child in the care of a non-relative foster family, the fact that placement was necessary and occurred, does not, in and of itself, address the effects of trauma or negate ongoing risk factors which threaten the child's social/emotional development and educational readiness. These risk factors could be mitigated for the child by participating in high quality child development programs.

  Recently, the supply of part-day services for preschool-age children in Los Angeles County has increased with the establishment of locally funded LAUP preschool programs for four year olds; the introduction of CDE/CDD funded Prekindergarten and Family Literacy Programs, also for four year olds; and the expansion of State Preschool programs for three and four year olds. In addition, the federally funded Head Start program continues to provide largely part-day services to three and four year olds.

While these services are welcome, many foster parents and relative caregivers, similar to other parents in Los Angeles County, are employed and in need of full-day child development services for multiple children ranging in age from infants through school-age. In order to make these part-day programs truly accessible, services need to accommodate the needs of working parents, including foster parents and relative caregivers. Additional resources are needed to extend and/or align these child development programs to meet the needs of families in Los Angeles County. The integration of resources from CDE/CDD and the Child Welfare sector could result in critically needed and innovative services.

- The second major obstacle impeding access to subsidized child care services is the complexity of the system. Efforts to encourage foster parents and relative caregivers to use free or subsidized child care services will require that Children's Services Workers (CSWs), foster parents, and relative caregivers be made aware of:

  - The benefits to young children who participate in high quality early childhood programs;

  - Local programs where children can be enrolled;

  - Processes and timelines for enrolling foster children and other children in care; and

  - Expectations for parent participation.

  As a result, DCFS will most likely encounter training needs and work load issues for staff. CSWs will need to become familiar with the subsidized child care system, and mechanisms to track utilization will need to be implemented. The Roundtable and ECC, as well as other community-based organizations, are willing to work with DCFS to develop protocols which encourage foster parents, relative caregivers, and other DCFS clients with a need for child care and development services to:

  - Access free or subsidized child care services such as State Preschool, Head Start, and LAUP;

  - Maximize DCFS' existing CDE/CDD contract to provide subsidized child care services to relative caregivers and teen parents in the foster care system; and

  - Where appropriate, access subsidized child care services in the foster care system, and school-age children.

Implementation of such protocols would be consistent with Goal 5 of the Los Angeles County Strategic Plan – Children and Families' Well-Being, the goals of the Healthy Communities, Strong Families and Thriving Children Initiative, the Prenatal through Three initiative of First 5 LA Commission, and LAUP. Work by the Center for the Study of Social Policy has shown that investments in the capacity of child development programs to promote healthy families can reduce the incidence of child abuse and neglect, (*Advancing child abuse and neglect protective factors: The role of early care and education infrastructure,* by S.L. Kagen, 2003, developed for the Center for the Study of Social Policy).

Conclusion

The Roundtable has indicated that it welcomes the opportunity to work in partnership with the CEO and DCFS to expand the pool of child care providers who are able to effectively meet the needs of children and families at risk of, or involved with the child welfare system. We believe that this collaborative effort to engage the child care community in the PCAN training has significant potential. We recognize that Los Angeles County's local licensed child care community currently has the capacity to care for over 359,000 children, that relationships between child care providers and families are unique in their intimacy, and that relationships can be instrumental in helping parents who might abuse their children find alternative strategies that allow them to parent more effectively.

The Roundtable also welcomes the ability to work with the CEO and DCFS to establish and institutionalize protocols which facilitate access to high quality, subsidized child development services for children living with foster parents and relative caregivers. And, finally the Roundtable is prepared to work with the CEO and DCFS to identify new resources to expand access to high quality child development services for children and families involved with or at risk of involvement with the child welfare system.

If you have any questions regarding this update, please contact Kathleen Malaske-Samu, of the CEO staff at (213) 974-2440 or e-mail at kmalaske@ceo.lacounty.gov.

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