County of Los Angeles
DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES

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December 6, 2010

To: Supervisor Michael D. Antonovich, Mayor
Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas
Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky
Supervisor Don Knabe
Supervisor Gloria Molina

From: Patricia S. Ploehn
Director

10/19/10 MOTION RESPONSE: DCFS TITLE IV-E WAIVER PERFORMANCE AND OUTCOMES UPDATE

This responds to your Board's October 19, 2010, motion, introduced by Supervisor Antonovich and Supervisor Ridley-Thomas, instructing the Chief Executive Office and the Director of the Department of Children and Family Services to report on the outcomes of the Title IV-E Waiver to date; and address the issues brought forth in the Los Angeles IV-E Waiver CAP Interim Evaluation Report completed by Dr. Charles Ferguson.

The Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) is the public child welfare agency charged with establishing, managing and advocating a system of services in partnership with parents, relatives, foster parents, community organizations and other County agencies to provide for the safety and well being of the children in our County.

DCFS recently completed the third year of the five-year Title IV-E Waiver Capped Allocation Demonstration Project, commonly referred to as the Waiver. The Waiver allows for the flexible use of funds to serve children and families better, with the outcomes of safety, permanency and well-being of children. The Waiver was officially implemented on July 1, 2007, with the funding cap based on a funding formula that utilized averages of the Federal fiscal years of 2002-2005 and the State fiscal years of 2005-2007. As recently reported to your Board, the Federal Government has granted the State of California a 10-month extension of the Waiver from July 1, 2012, through January 12, 2013. This extension permits the Waiver to continue in both participating counties, Alameda and Los Angeles, through the completion of the final evaluation of the Waiver Project, allowing time for all parties to determine the viability and advisability of continuing the Waiver into the future.

This update includes data and information demonstrating our County's ongoing progress towards the Waiver outcomes. Key measures from 2007 through the first six months of 2010 are highlighted. In addition to citing the progress we have made, this update also discusses areas we are focusing on to achieve continuous improvement that will enable us to move forward and maintain confidence that we are wisely utilizing our resources and keeping children safe within their home whenever possible, or in out-of-home care when necessary.

During these first three years of the Waiver, we have focused on the prevention of abuse and neglect, strengthening families and communities to keep children safe and preventing them from entering foster care unnecessarily, and achieving timely and safe family reunification or alternate permanency through legal guardianship or adoption.

We continue to realize the benefits of building our programs around six key goals: 1) Increased Safety; 2) Improved Permanence; 3) Reduced Reliance on Out-of-Home Care; 4) Self-Sufficiency; 5) Child and Family Well-being; and, 6) Organizational Excellence. Success in these areas has been augmented by the recent development and implementation of a series of practices and program improvements, including: 1) Child Safety Enhancements and Higher Level Management Accountability; 2) Automated Alerts and Reporting Tools; 3) Expansion of Team Decision-Making; 4) Expanded Medical Hub Services; and, 5) Increased focus on Quality Assurance and Quality Improvement.

POSITIVE OUTCOMES

Prior to the Waiver, we were funded using traditional child welfare funding which was primarily tied to the number of children we had in out-of-home care, and the use of foster care funds was largely restricted to services for those children in foster care. This created a perverse incentive to remove more children from their family and place them in care in order to draw down funds to serve them. Because this Department was focused on safely reducing the number of children in foster care, developing programs to keep children safely in their home or move them out of foster care posed a fiscal challenge. Fortunately, on June 26, 2007, your Board approved the Waiver plan to make critical changes in the way child welfare services are provided to children and families in the County. In agreement with the State and Federal government, the Waiver provides a set allocation that is not dependent on the number of children in foster care and allows the flexibility to fund programs related to the safety and well-being of the child regardless of whether the child was in foster care. The advent of the Waiver brought a tremendous opportunity to further our efforts to keep children safely in their home or move them to permanency and self-sufficiency while using our funding to support the family, child, and youth's success. Programs like the Prevention Initiative, Team Decision Making, and Point of Engagement, which help to keep families safe, and Wraparound, Parents in Partnership, and Visitation Centers, which help reunify children with their parents, and the Permanency Partners Program and Older Youth Adoption Project, which help find permanent homes for older children and teenagers and prepare them for self-sufficiency, have flourished under the flexible funding of the Waiver. Our Department continues to attain remarkable results in achieving better outcomes for the children and families we serve. We are keeping

more children safely with their own families rather than subjecting them to the trauma of being removed, and moving children, who cannot be safely returned home, more quickly to permanency and self-sufficiency and through adoption or legal guardianship or to a successful transition to adulthood.

Following are key statistics that clearly show the great strides we have made during the Waiver period:

As of October 31, 2010, 33,317 children were receiving in-home and out-of-home services in Los Angeles County. Of that number, approximately 15,650 children were in foster care. This is a decrease of 4,868 (-24%) since January 2007*. Of the children living in foster care, 7,564 children (48%) are living in Relative/Non-Relative Extended Family Member Homes.

As shown in the attached "LA County DCFS Fast Facts" (Attachment I), additional key outcomes realized from January 2007 through October 31, 2010, include:

- The percent of timely adoptions (children adopted within 24 months) increased from 21.6% to 25.9%, **an increase of 5.3 %**.
- The percent of timely (within 12-months) reunifications increased from 58.2% to 64.5%, **an increase of 6.3%**.
- The number of children in Long Term Foster Care was reduced from 11,117 to 6,641, **a decrease of 40%**.
- The median length of stay in out-of-home placement was reduced from 536 days to 408 days, **a decrease of 24%.**
- The average time a child spends in foster was reduced from 1,261 days to 902 days, a reduction of 359 days and **decrease of 28%**.*

* Please, also reference attached chart "Average Days and Number of Children in Out-of-Home Placement" (Attachment II).
These numbers reflect the impact of practices implemented that improve child safety and family stability through providing needed supports to keep a child safely in his or her home or lessen their time in foster care before being returned to or placed in a safe, permanent and nurturing home.

It is worth noting we strive to serve children in their own home when it can be done safely. Research, as well as best practice, has shown that removal of a child from their family is traumatic and every effort should be made to provide the services and supports to the child with their family as long as that can be done safely. If it cannot be done safely and children must be removed from their families, we make every effort to safely reunify them or find an alternate permanent home for them through adoption or legal guardianship. Nationally, child

welfare policy and practice has indicated that is the right way to practice social work and it is the right thing to do for children and families. The funds generated from the Waiver are directed to enhance and increase services to children and families and improve outcomes in safety, permanency and well-being. There is no fiscal incentive to keep a child in their parent's home unless it can be done safely. In fact, the success of the Waiver is fundamentally based on our success in keeping children safe, whether in or out of their home.

CHILD SAFETY FOCUS AREAS AND DR. FERGUSON'S INTERIM EVALUATION

We continuously review and refine our process and procedures, and areas delineated below are being focused on to further child safety. These areas are related to the child safety indicators being evaluated by the State during the Waiver period. In his Interim Evaluation Report, State Waiver evaluator Charles Ferguson, PhD., highlighted four child safety areas that we are enhancing with additional focus on child safety.

First is the child safety indicator "no recurrence of maltreatment during the subsequent six month period." This indicator describes the number of children who had no additional substantiated allegation of abuse or neglect for six months following a finding of a substantiated allegation. The national goal is 94.6% of children who did not have a recurrence of maltreatment during the six months following the intervention of a child protection agency. In the five years previous to the Waiver, we rose from 90.8% to a high of 93.4%, then rose to 93.5% at the point of the interim evaluation. (Note: We are 9/10 of a percent below the national average and have implemented a number of child safety enhancements to our initial investigation process to allow us to meet and exceed the national standard.)

Second, for the child safety indicator "recurrence of a substantiated allegation within 12 months for children who had not been removed from home after a previous substantiated allegation," the percentage increased from 9.6% for the 6 month period prior to the start of the Waiver (January 1, 2007 to July 1, 2007) to 11.4% at the point of Dr. Ferguson's interim evaluation. This is an increase of 1.8%. (Note: This indicator was initially incorrectly stated as a 6-month measure in the Ferguson report. Dr. Ferguson has since corrected the report to show this as a 12 month measure. Also, Dr. Ferguson's report characterizes the 1.8% increase as a 19% increase. This refers to the fact that the overall increase of 1.8% is 19% of the original 9.6%; that is, 19% of 9.6% = 1.8%.) According to the most recently posted data, our performance in this area is showing continuous improvement, as the recurrence rate has decreased from 11.4% to 10.9% for the twelve month period ending March 31, 2010 (reference http://cssr.berkeley.edu/ucb_childwelfare/RecurAlleg.aspx).

Third, for the child safety indicator "no maltreatment in foster care," the national goal is 99.68% children in foster care being without an episode of abuse or neglect. At the time of the evaluation, we were at 99.58%, 1/10 of a percent below the national average. The implementation of the new Out-of-Home Care Investigation Section will help us meet or exceed the national goal.

Fourth, for the exits to permanency indicator "reentry following reunification," DCFS exceeded the national goal of limiting reentries to less than or equal to 9.9% for the three years prior to 2005. Unfortunately, the ability to limit reentries at that time was directly correlated to our past practice of not reunifying children in a timely manner. As improved practice allowed more reunifications in a timely manner, reentries increased slightly. Reentries were at 10.6% at the start of the Waiver, and increased to 10.8% at the time of the evaluation, 9/10 of a percent above the national average. Similar to the first goal above, continuing to focus on conducting accurate risk assessments prior to reunification and identifying families in need of continued support services following reunification will improve our performance for this indicator.

While these findings are within the context of seventeen performance indicators, with varying trends noted by Dr. Ferguson, it is important that we continuously pay particular attention to improvements in key indicators of child safety and permanency. To support us meeting and exceeding the national standard in these key indicators, we have initiated a heightened focus on the following four areas: Child Death Review and Reporting; Timely Completion of Emergency Response Investigations; Oversight of Out-of-Home Care; and Preparing Youth for Self-Sufficiency. Each is discussed further below.

Child Death Review and Reporting. In 2008, we began disclosing information regarding child deaths in compliance with State Senate Bill 39 (SB39). While we have made diligent efforts to comply fully with SB39, we underestimated the resources needed to meet the disclosure timeframes. To rectify this, we are working with the Chief Executive Office to develop a single source for collecting and reporting child death data in a reliable and timely manner, and to develop dedicated resources to comply with the many and varied requirements for SB39 compliance. We are also reviewing how our Waiver programs might better enhance child safety by reviewing any trends discovered through our investigation of SB39 child deaths. In addition, research has identified no correlation between our practice of keeping families safely together and child fatalities. While we have expanded the definition of what constitutes death due to abuse and neglect, there has been no significant increase in the number of child deaths due to abuse or neglect over time.

Timely Completion of Emergency Response. Child abuse investigations (referrals) are to be completed within 60 days. Over the past year, as we implemented a number of enhancements to our investigation process aimed at ensuring children were safer, we found that our investigations took longer. But, now our investigations are also much more comprehensive and of much higher quality. As a result, the children we serve are safer and their families are stronger. In July, we had approximately 6,200 investigations open over 60 days, and we have been able to reduce that number to about 3,780 referrals as of the end of November. While this reflects that our efforts to eliminate the referrals open over 60 days are working, the effort requires a significant redirection of personnel to our frontline operations. It is important to emphasize the children associated with these referrals have been seen and assessed for safety, but the referrals remain open for a variety of reasons, such as, difficulty competing required collateral contacts, delays in receiving needed medical reports or other diagnostic information, or other reasons. To fully address this situation and implement a long-

term resolution, as part of our workgroup process, we will review whether any of the safety enhancements implemented in the past year, such as additional management review of investigations and increased number of required collateral contacts are critical to enhanced safety or if we can implement other effective, and more streamlined, ways to ensure comprehensive high-quality investigations. We are analyzing whether we have the correct staffing levels for our Emergency Response units. A preliminary review of Child Protection Hotline calls revealed approximately 4900 more referrals (i.e., investigations) were generated during the first nine months of 2010 as compared to the first nine months of 2009.

Oversight of Out-of-Home Care. To focus on improving safety for children in out-of-home care, we are implementing an out-of-home care investigation section patterned on a similar unit the Department discontinued years ago. In addition to focusing on the safety of children in out-of-home care, reemphasizing accountability of licensed and certified homes should support exceeding the national goal for "no maltreatment in foster care" as noted in Dr. Ferguson's report.

Preparing Youth for Self-sufficiency. Recent State budget cuts have reduced the financial aid and services we can provide our youth who are aging out of foster care. This means we must increase our efforts to identify alternative ways to ensure these youth receive the support they need to be self-sufficient and responsible members of our community. To that end, we are engaged with the Chief Executive Officers' Service Integration Branch and members of the Commission for Children and Families among others, to redesign our programs for older and former foster youth. Preparing these youth to be productive adults is truly a part of our core mission and we need to deliver supportive services. While programs directly serving youth that have aged out of foster care cannot be paid for with Waiver reinvestment funds, maintaining and enhancing our services to this population is part of how we will measure our success during the Waiver period.

MOVING FORWARD

A major focus of our use of Waiver reinvestment funds will continue to be improving child safety. This focus includes safety for our children living with their biological family or alternative permanent homes, in out-of-home care, after leaving out-of-home care and for our youth exiting foster care into adulthood.

In the coming months, our emphasis on child safety will focus on the areas outlined above including the major categories of reducing re-abuse, recurrence of maltreatment and resulting substantiated allegations, maltreatment in care and reentry. Besides collecting and analyzing the data, we will also assess the factors that surround an incident such as who the child lived with, the relationship of the perpetrator, how much time elapsed since the last contact with DCFS, what are the ages of the victims, are there trends in communities, offices, units, etc.

We are focused on continuous quality improvements and how those improvements will increase and enhance safety for children. Areas being explored include improving decision

making both at the Hotline and in the field, engaging others such as law enforcement, schools, community-based agencies and other county departments, and exploring ways to increase support to strengthen families, adoptive families and relative caregivers. We will also be looking at increasing what we already know that works, such as, increasing the quality of visits, reducing caseloads and workloads of social workers, augmenting post adoption and aftercare services, ensuring comprehensive work is done in the area of SDM Safety and Risk and improving the training and supervision of staff through implementation of the Los Angeles Practice Model and a Coaching and Mentoring Training Model.

To help keep us moving forward, working with the CEO and our Union partners, we have established a steering team and workgroups to guide process improvement in various Operations and Programmatic Priorities. The Operations Priorities team will monitor various areas, such as, Regional Management, Supervisory Accountability, Implementation of the Office of Independent Review's Recommendations, Data, Training and Policy. The Programmatic Priorities team will monitor the implementation of key initiatives, including Emergency Response, Out-of-Home Care Investigation Unit, our Youth Self-Sufficiency Plan, AB12 Law to Extend Foster Care and our plan to increase our use of Search and Detention Warrants.

CONCLUSION

Children's safety depends on strong families and strong families depend on their connections to one another and to a network of community support. Through our partnerships and active involvement of other county Departments, community based agencies, prevention and family preservation networks, faith-based organizations, and others, DCFS has joined with a variety of stakeholders in a county-wide effort to keep children safe and expand services and supports helping parents and caregivers to raise children in healthy families and thriving communities.

All of this could not be done without the flexibility the Waiver has provided and we look forward to moving into the future improving child safety and well-being. As one of just a handful of child welfare agencies across the country participating in the Waiver, and as the largest child welfare agency doing so, other child welfare agencies from across the country look to Los Angeles County as a developing model of successful fiscal and programmatic child welfare practice change.

As we move through the second half of the Waiver period and consider possibly extending the Waiver beyond 2013, we will continue to evaluate outcomes and expand programs that best keep children safe (including an increased focus on prevention and quality comprehensive investigations and aftercare), strengthen families, move children to timely legal permanency, and better prepare older youth to be self-sufficient. By focusing on outcomes, we will be able to provide your Board with the information necessary to make informed decisions on whether to continue in the Waiver should it be reauthorized after 2013.

Should you have any questions, please contact me, or your staff may contact Armand Montiel of my staff at (213) 351-5530.

PSP:am

Attachments

c: Chief Executive Officer
Deputy Chief Executive Officer, Children and Families Well-Being
County Counsel
Executive Officer, Board of Supervisors
Chief Probation Officer

L.A. COUNTY DCFS FAST FACTS

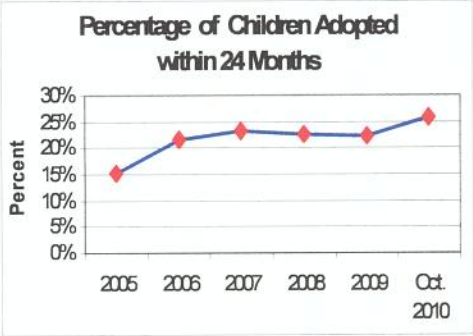
(As of October 31, 2010)

- As of October 31, 2010, 33,317 children received in-home and out-of-home services in Los Angeles County. Of that number, approximately 15,650 children are in foster care (47%). Of the children living in foster care, 7,564 children (48%) are living in Relative/Non-Relative Extended Family Member Homes.

Data Source: CWS/CMS History.

- From December 2005 to October 31, 2010, the percent of timely (24-month) adoptions increase by 10.6%.

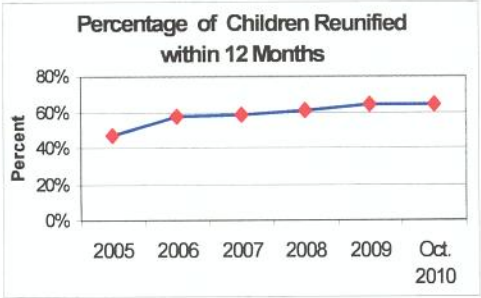
CY 1/2005 to 12/2005.....15.3%
CY 1/2006 to 12/2006.....21.6%
CY 1/2007 to 12/2007.....23.3%
CY 1/2008 to 12/2008.....22.8%
CY 1/2009 to 12/2009.....22.2%
CY 1/2010 to 10/2010.....25.9%



Data Source: CWS/CMS Datamart.

- From December 2005 to October 31, 2010, the percent of timely (12-month) reunifications increased by 17.3%.

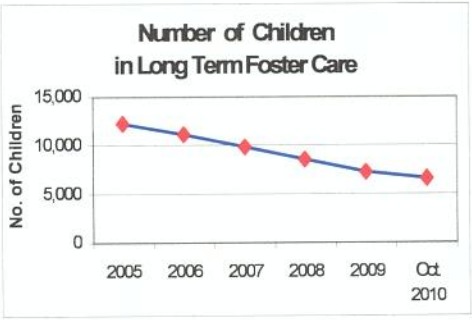
CY 1/2005 to 12/2005.....47.2%
CY 1/2006 to 12/2006.....58.2%
CY 1/2007 to 12/2007.....58.6%
CY 1/2008 to 12/2008.....61.1%
CY 1/2009 to 12/2009.....64.7%
CY 1/2010 to 10/2010.....64.5%



Data Source: CWS/CMS Datamart.

- From December 2005 to October 31, 2010, the number of children in Long Term Foster Care (children in out of home placement with PP service component) decreased by 46%.

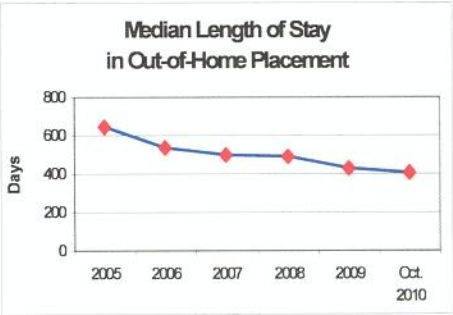
As of 12/31/2005.....12,277
As of 12/31/2006.....11,117
As of 12/31/2007..... 9,918
As of 12/31/2008 8,547
As of 12/31/2009 7,216
As of 10/31/2010 6,641



Data Source: CWS/CMS History.
(Excludes children in Guardian Homes).

- From December 2005 to October 31, 2010, the median length of stay in out of home placement decreased by 37%.

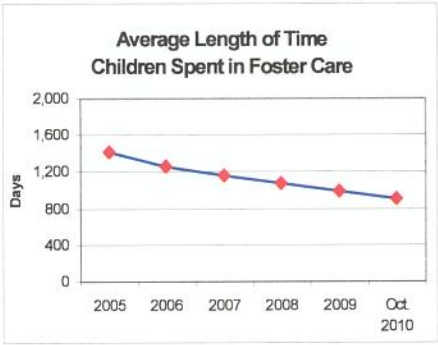
  As of 12/31/2005.....649 days
  As of 12/31/2006.....536 days
  As of 12/31/2007.....501 days
  As of 12/31/2008.....491 days
  As of 12/31/2009.....433 days
  As of 10/31/2010.....408 days



Data Source: CWS/CMS History.

- From December 2005 to October 31, 2010, the average length-of-time children spend in Foster Care decreased by 36%.

  As of 12/31/2005.....1,417 days
  As of 12/31/2006.....1,261 days
  As of 12/31/2007.....1,168 days
  As of 12/31/2008.....1,080 days
  As of 12/31/2009..... 987 days
  As of 10/31/2010..... 902 days (-9%)

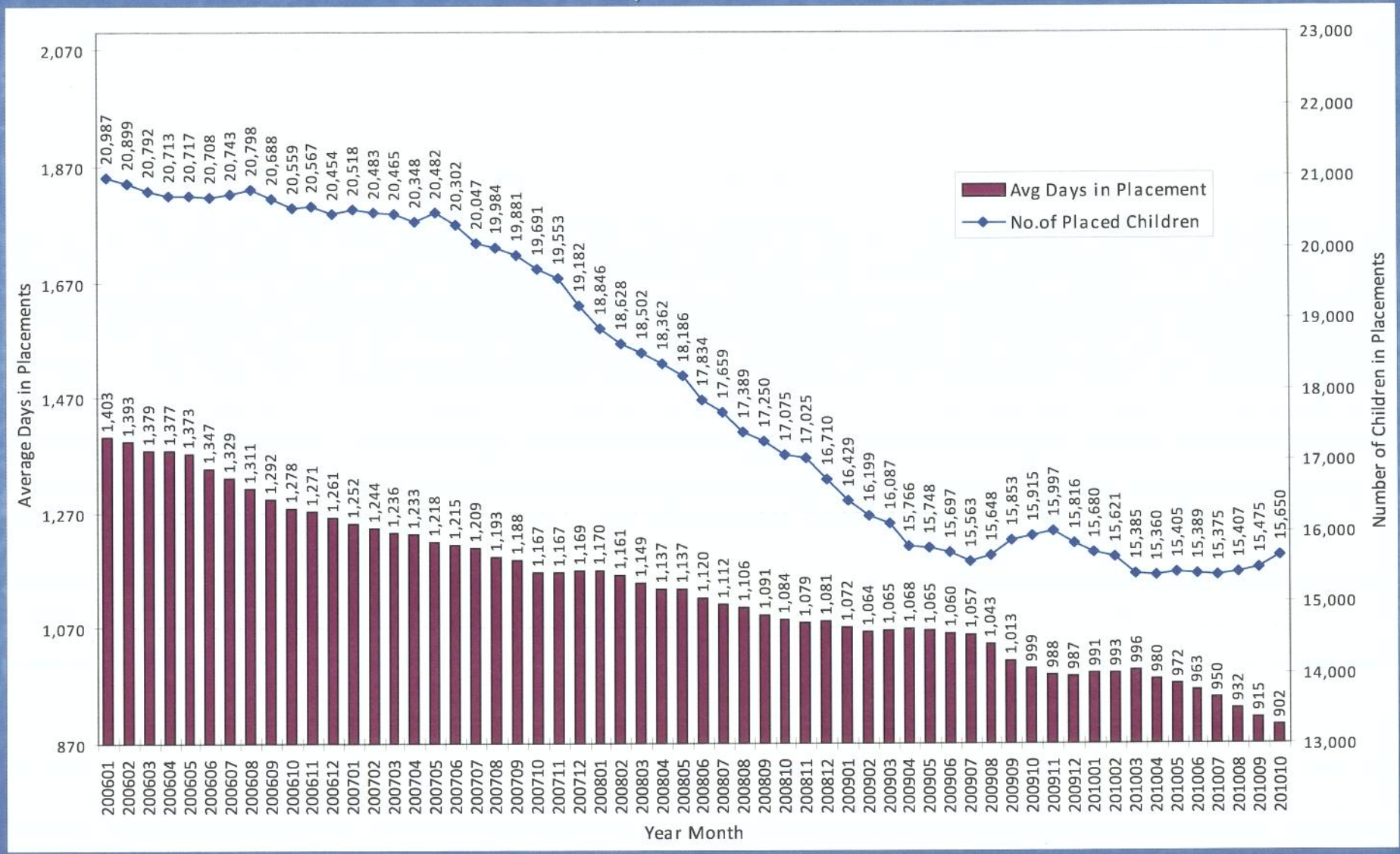


Data Source: CWS/CMS History.

ATTACHMENT II

Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services

Monthly Children in Out-of-Home Placement
with Average Days in Placement
from January 2006 to October 2010



NOTE: Excludes Children in Guardian Home, Adoptive Home and Non-Foster Care Placements

Data Source: DCFS CWS/CMS Datamart and History database.