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TO: Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas, Chairman
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FROM: Wendy L. Watanabe
Auditor-Controller

SUBJECT: **CHILDREN'S GROUP HOME OMBUDSMAN SEMI-ANNUAL REPORT – JULY 1, 2012 THROUGH DECEMBER 31, 2012**

This memorandum is to provide you with information about the Children's Group Home Ombudsman (Ombudsman) Program for the period of July 1 through December 31, 2012. This report was last issued in 2011, and is being reestablished to ensure accountability and transparency for the Ombudsman Program within the Auditor-Controller (A-C).

Background

The A-C's Ombudsman serves as an advocate for children placed in group homes by the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS). The Ombudsman provides a confidential and informal process to resolve concerns that arise from children residing in group homes. The Ombudsman responds to issues received mainly through a toll-free hotline and a few from a designated e-mail address, with the remaining through periodic site visits. The hotline number and e-mail address are advertised on an Ombudsman poster, which is required to be displayed in every County-contracted group home. In addition, during site visits children are encouraged to call the hotline number if they need assistance resolving problems.

Upon receiving a complaint, the Ombudsman will discuss the issue with the resident and determine an appropriate course of action. The Ombudsman may contact any party, including agency personnel, group home providers, or others, as needed, to

gather information and suggest a reasonable and fair solution that is within the children's rights and established regulations.

According to the DCFS Child Welfare Services – December 2012 Fact Sheet (http://www.lacdcfs.org/aboutus/factsheets.html) there are approximately 1,042 Los Angeles County children living in 176 group homes, located both within and outside the County.

Summary of Hotline Calls

During this reporting period, the Ombudsman received a total of 72 calls, an average of 12 calls per month. Below is a summary of the nature of calls to the Ombudsman:

Personal Rights Concerns	**Number of Calls**
Allowance/clothing/personal property	9
Respect	7
Work/job skills	5
Health/medical, dental, psychiatric care	3
Living conditions	3
School/community/religious services	3
Social/family contact	3
Contact	1
Food	1
Subtotal	*35*
Personal Concerns	**Number of Calls**
Fear, threats, or intimidation	1
Pregnancy/infant care	1
Substance abuse	1
Subtotal	*3*
"Other" Concerns	**Number of Calls**
Issues with Social Worker	7
Communication	1
Placement	1
Subtotal	*9*
General Information	**Number of Calls**
Total	*25*
Grand Total Calls	**72**

Within the purview of the Ombudsman, all calls for personal rights concerns, personal concerns, and "other" concerns were timely resolved through communication with social workers, group home staff, and/or appropriate State contacts. All callers received follow up calls as needed for resolution. In addition, all callers seeking general information received an answer, or were redirected to the appropriate party, as needed.

The following are examples of Ombudsman hotline calls received:

- A youth stated she was having problems with her social worker not allowing her to visit with friends. She made a list of friends she would like to have contact with. The Ombudsman contacted the social worker and the supervisor, and shared the child's contact list. After discussion, the child was allowed to make contact with the friends on her list.

- A youth alleged that a group home staff was not administering her baby the prescribed dosage of Tylenol. This staff was with the youth at the doctor's office when the doctor discussed the dosage. The Ombudsman spoke with the group home nurse and explained the youth was unclear about the dosing instructions. The Ombudsman recommended the nurse show the youth the written prescription and the dosage chart that was given to her baby.

Outreach

One of the Ombudsman's responsibilities is to visit group homes and provide DCFS children and group home staff with information about the Ombudsman function. During this reporting period, the Ombudsman visited 16 group homes, including some group home providers with multiple sites. The Ombudsman provided 95 DCFS-placed children with information about the Ombudsman Program through verbal presentations and flyers/brochures. During these visits, group home residents had the opportunity to ask questions and share their concerns. The Ombudsman looked into their issues, and followed up with the residents as needed. The following group homes were visited and represent 11% of the group home sites that regularly house DCFS-placed children.

Group Home	Number of Sites	Site Visit Location	Supervisorial District(s)
Dream Catcher	3	Los Angeles	2
Ettie Lee	1	Fontana	San Bernardino County
Fred Jefferson Memorial Home for Boys	2	Compton	2
Hillsides	4	Pasadena	1, 5
Los Angeles Youth Network	1	Los Angeles	3
Maryvale	1	Rosemead	1

Group Home	Number of Sites	Site Visit Location	Supervisorial District(s)
Moore's Cottage	1	Altadena	1
Orange County Children's Foundation – Harbor site	1	Carson	2
Project Six	1	Van Nuys	3
Teens Happy Home	1	Los Angeles	2
Total	16		

Conclusion

During the next reporting period, we plan to increase the number of Ombudsman group home visits, to provide greater outreach and awareness among group home youth. We also plan to include comparative data on visits and call activity in future reports. In addition, we have begun reviewing group home audit and monitoring reports as part of our site-visit planning process, to identify critical findings so we can collaborate with DCFS and Community Care Licensing in following-up on the status of existing service-related corrective actions. We believe this collaboration will enhance living conditions for and services to group home youth.

If you have any questions or need additional information, please call me or your staff may contact Michelle Day, Children's Group Home Ombudsman, at (213) 893-0551 or via e-mail at mday@auditor.lacounty.gov.

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