County of Los Angeles
DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES
425 Shatto Place, Los Angeles, California 90020
(213) 351-5602

PHILIP L. BROWNING
Director

FESIA A. DAVENPORT
Chief Deputy Director

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May 6, 2014

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

From: Philip L. Browning
Director

Jerry Powers
Chief Probation Officer

RESPONSE TO THE MARCH 25, 2014 BOARD MOTION (ITEM NO. 4) ON STRENGTHENING SAFEGUARDS FOR AT-RISK CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE AND GROUP HOMES TO PREVENT SEXUAL EXPLOITATION BY HUMAN TRAFFICKERS

Executive Summary

This report is in response to this Board's motion on March 25, 2014, wherein you:

1. Directed the Directors of the Departments of Children and Family Services (DCFS) and Probation, in consultation with County Counsel, to report back to the Board within 30 days on the feasibility of a plan for and any costs associated with:

    a. Entering into an agreement with local institutions of higher learning, requiring the institutions to develop and deliver training aimed at: identifying victims who have been Commercially Sexually Exploited Children (CSEC); understanding the underlying needs of CSEC victims; understanding the pattern of behavior of CSEC victims; and identifying emergent best practices that address the behaviors and unique needs of CSEC victims.

2. Directed the Directors of DCFS and Probation, in consultation with County Counsel, to report back to the Board within 30 days on the feasibility of implementing the following:

    a. Requiring State licensed foster parents to complete annual CSEC training substantially similar to the training described in paragraph 1, subdivision (a);

b. Entering into an agreement with foster family agencies (FFAs) who care for DCFS-placed children requiring the agencies to ensure that their staff and certified foster parents complete annual CSEC training that is substantially similar to the training described in paragraph 1, subdivision (a); and

c. Entering into an agreement with group homes (GH) who care for DCFS-placed or Probation-placed children requiring the GH to ensure that their staff and providers complete annual CSEC training that is substantially similar to the training described in paragraph 1, subdivision (a).

3. The amended motion directed that the Director of DCFS to work to secure State funding to provide resources for the proposed training.

Background

In November 2012, this Board made a commitment to combat CSEC victimization. DCFS and Probation jointly led a CSEC task force and produced a report with recommendations to address sex trafficking of children in Los Angeles County. The Board has since issued additional directives to support the County's efforts towards addressing the issue of CSEC.

CSEC Training For State-Licensed Foster Parents

We believe that an important component in addressing the issue of CSEC is having well-trained foster parents who can help to support CSEC victims. As requested by the Board motion, DCFS can add CSEC training as a requirement for state licensed foster parents. The California Department of Social Services (CDSS) has issued regulations which govern training requirements for State licensed foster homes. While CSEC training is not one of the required training topics required by CDSS Community Care Licensing Division, it does not preclude a county from requiring county-provided pre-placement or post-placement foster parent training. As such, DCFS can add this requirement for those State licensed foster parents with whom DCFS places children.

CSEC Training For Certified Foster Parents, FFAs and GHs

DCFS can add a CSEC training requirement to FFA and group home contracts. DCFS currently contracts with FFAs who are responsible for certifying foster parents. DCFS' existing FFA contracts require that FFAs ensure certified foster parents receive initial and ongoing training to enable foster parents to provide safe care and services to foster children.

In addition, Assembly Bill 2035 (Chesboro) is pending in the State legislature. If enacted, this bill would require annual CSEC training for FFA and group home providers. However, regardless of whether the bill passes, DCFS and Probation believe that training for FFAs, group homes and certified foster parents is an essential component to addressing the very important issue of CSEC. To that end, the existing contracts for FFAs can be amended to

require annual CSEC training for relevant staff and foster parents who would potentially have a CSEC youth placed in their home. DCFS estimates that it can complete a contract amendment within six months of the date we receive the Board's directive to do so. DCFS and Probation could amend their respective group home contracts in a similar fashion.

Agreement With Local Institutions Of Higher Learning

Most CSEC training is geared towards law enforcement, child welfare, and health care professionals. It is therefore imperative that a training curriculum be developed to specifically address the needs of foster parents (both State licensed and certified). DCFS will hire a consultant to design and develop a CSEC training curriculum that specifically addresses the needs of the relevant staff employed by FFAs and group homes, while also addressing the needs of those foster parents who could have a CSEC youth placed in their care. Once developed, the curriculum must be delivered in a clear manner. A group comprised of relevant staff from a small number of FFAs, group homes, and foster parents would be identified to participate in a training pilot. The final curriculum would incorporate feedback from the pilot, as appropriate, before the final curriculum is rolled out county-wide. To comply with this motion, DCFS will, through its existing contract with the local schools of social work, secure the services of a consultant to design, develop, and test a CSEC curriculum.

Training Development and Delivery Cost

The cost to secure the CSEC consultant could be covered under DCFS' existing contract with the local schools of social work. However, we will not know the cost to deliver the training county-wide until the pilot is completed. We will return in ninety days to provide a sample curriculum, and estimated costs for a county-wide roll out. Once the training is developed and tested, DCFS will have a better understanding of the cost necessary to deliver the training to Los Angeles County foster parents, FFAs, and group home providers.

Securing State Funding

On February 28, 2014, the County Welfare Directors Association of California (CWDA) submitted a request for funding to the members of the State Senate Budget Subcommittee No. 3 requesting that the State legislature allocate $20.3 million in state general fund to build capacity in local child welfare agencies to serve CSEC victims. CWDA recommended that resources should be targeted to three deliverables: prevention, intervention and direct service. Aligned with these deliverables, the provision of training on CSEC issues for foster care providers will serve as a first line of prevention and offer direct and immediate interventions to begin to address the needs of CSEC victims. We hope that county-wide implementation of CSEC training for FFAs, group homes and foster parents can be supported by funding made available pursuant to CWDA's funding proposal. Otherwise, we hope that the training efforts can be supported by local County funding since there will likely be a cost associated with this effort.

On March 28, 2014, and pursuant to this Board's direction to work to secure State funding for CSEC training, the DCFS Director submitted to the State Senate Budget Subcommittee No. 3, a letter in support of CWDA's budget request. DCFS recommends that this Board direct the County's legislative advocates to draft a five signature letter supporting CWDA's budget proposal.

If you have any questions, please call us or your staff may contact Aldo Marin, DCFS Office of Board Relations, at (213) 351-5530 or Michelle Guymon, Department of Probation, at (661) 236-5405.

PLB:JP:FAD
MR:emm

c: Chief Executive Office
County Counsel
Executive Officer, Board of Supervisors