

MOTION BY SUPERVISOR SHEILA KUEHL

October 6, 2015

SUPPORTING LGBTQ YOUTH IN FOSTER CARE

This Sunday, October 11, 2015 will mark the 27th anniversary of National Coming Out Day. Every year on this day, we celebrate and support those who come out as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer (LGBTQ) or as an ally for equality, to remind everyone of the great power of openness and visibility, and being honest about who we are. Every person who speaks up has the ability to change hearts and minds, and to create new advocates for equality.

Today, in honor of National Coming Out Day, I ask that my colleagues join me in speaking up for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning youth in the Los Angeles County child welfare system. These youth face unique challenges and barriers to finding positive outcomes and permanent homes—challenges stemming from discrimination due to their sexual orientation, gender identity and/or gender expression. Not only are LGBTQ youth overrepresented in the foster care population, there are also significant disparities in experience between LGBTQ youth and their non-LGBTQ counterparts. These disparities could be mitigated if we develop and utilize accurate data and enhanced training efforts to more fully address their needs, including identifying and remediating the effects of bullying and trauma.

MOTION

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RIDLEY-THOMAS _____

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ANTONOVICH _____

As part of a five-year, federal grant awarded to the LGBT Center in Los Angeles, the Williams Institute at UCLA and Holarchy Consulting conducted a landmark study of 786 randomly sampled foster youth ages 12 to 21. The findings show that 19 percent—nearly one in five—foster youth in Los Angeles County identify as LGBTQ. This means that there are between 1.5 and 2 times more LGBTQ youth as a percentage of young people in foster care than outside foster care.

Given this overrepresentation of LGBTQ youth among foster children, it is even more problematic that there has been very little focus on this population. According to the Williams-Holarchy study, LGBTQ youth have a higher than average number of foster care placements and a greater likelihood of being in a group home, hospitalized or homeless at some point in their lives. More stable placements and stronger reunification efforts could lead to improved educational and permanency outcomes. Costly group home and hospital stays could be avoided with a more targeted approach in serving this unique population. While many of our departments have made very good efforts to develop specialized LGBTQ programs, now is the time for the County to systematically address the needs of LGBTQ youth in our child welfare system.

I, THEREFORE, MOVE that the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors direct the Interim Office of Child Protection, in consultation with the Interim Chief Executive Officer and Departments of Children and Family Services (DCFS), Probation, Mental Health, Health, Public Social Services (DPSS), Public Health (DPH), Community and Senior Services (CSS), Office of Education, County Counsel and all other child and/or youth serving departments, to report back in 60 days on the following action items.

- Provide delegated authority of up to \$100,000 to hire an expert consultant to identify each County department currently serving LGBTQ youth in any capacity, and establish an inventory of LGBTQ-specific programs.

- For these departments, the consultant shall review existing demographic data collection, intake, service planning and case review processes to identify:
 - (1) improvements to providing culturally competent care and support;
 - (2) opportunities to add questions or information (in a culturally competent and sensitive manner) about sexual orientation, gender identity and discriminatory experiences to such data collection, intake, service planning and case review processes; and,
 - (3) identify training needs for department staff, as well as contractors (for example, DCFS Children's Social Workers and mental health providers, as well as foster and relative caregivers and parents) in order to raise the competency of those collecting this information or serving this population to do so confidentially, respectfully and accurately.
- The consultant shall work with the Office of Child Protection to submit recommendations no later than 180 days after the beginning of the contract period for the Board to consider for adoption.