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African-American Community Engagement – A Faith Based Model

A significant amount of research has documented the overrepresentation of certain racial and ethnic populations, including African-Americans and Native Americans, in the child welfare system when compared with their representation in the general population. Numerous studies have also shown that racial disparities occur at various, decision points in the child welfare continuum. Although some racial and ethnic groups are overrepresented in the child welfare system, other groups, such as Asians, are underrepresented. It is unclear whether underrepresentation is due to a lower occurrence of child maltreatment among those populations—perhaps due to cultural protective factors—or if it is caused by underreporting due to cultural perceptions of others or those populations being less likely to report maltreatment because of cultural norms.

There are a variety of possible causes of racial disproportionality and disparity. It is often difficult, however, to determine what particular factors at either the systems or

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individual case levels had an effect and to what degree. Ten years of research on this topic suggest four possible explanations: (1) Disproportionate and disparate needs of children and families of color, particularly due to higher rates of poverty; (2) Racial bias and discrimination exhibited by individuals (e.g., caseworkers, mandated and other reporters); (3) Child welfare system factors (e.g., lack of resources for families of color, a lack of quality assurance mechanisms that may help identify and correct differential treatment); (4) Geographic context, such as the region, State, or neighborhood.

For several years, the Department of Children and Family Services, with support from private partners, has worked to address racial disproportionality and disparity, with a particular emphasis on the Pomona area and African-American children. Various efforts, such as the September 2012 report, *Child Welfare Practice: Creating a Climate for Successful Change*, have also been leveraged. This work has resulted in various changes at both the institutional and ground levels. New efforts, such as the African American Community Engagement (ACE) Program, may also be employed to further reduce disproportionality among African-American children in foster care.

ACE, a program created by the community and for the community, aims to empower families to resolve their challenges and effectively utilize service systems. The program leverages program navigators through a multidisciplinary approach, and supports families with multigenerational involvement in the child welfare system through faith and community based resources that are both intensive and crisis oriented. By providing these resources, ACE seeks to safely reduce out-of-home placements and thus, reduce race disparities among African American children in foster care.

WE, THEREFORE, MOVE that the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors

direct the Department of Children and Family Services to report back in ninety days on the creation of a faith-based pilot, which builds on the *Child Welfare Practice: Creating a Climate for Successful Change* analysis and the ACE proposal by:

1. Creating an appropriately funded and formalized partnership with Pomona faith based organizations to provide services to families, including, but not limited to: cultural brokers, visitation support, respite care and other supportive services such as parenting classes, substance abuse counseling, and other supportive services; and
2. Including appropriate data collection methods to demonstrate the impact of this partnership.

Following the creation of this pilot, a report-back is due to the Board every six months for a twelve month period to assess progress and make recommendations for the continuation and permanent expansion of this program.

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