

MOTION BY SUPERVISOR KATHRYN BARGER

JULY 23, 2019

ANTELOPE VALLEY SOCIAL WORKER NEEDS

The staffing needs of the Antelope Valley Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) offices have been identified as an important issue for the department for many years, most recently in the California State Auditor report of May 2019 and the Office of Child Protection (OCP) Anthony Avalos recommendations. Staff should have the needed resources and time to dedicate to their caseloads, and have experienced supervisorial staff overseeing their decisions and recommendations.

Caseloads/Staffing

The Board passed a motion on May 28, 2019 directing DCFS to report on how they will implement the State Auditor’s recommendations of May 2019 on decreasing social worker caseloads and supervisor to staff ratios. The State Audit found that the supervisor to staff ratio in the Palmdale DCFS office remains 1 supervisor to 7.3 staff, which is higher than what the union agreement allows of 1 supervisor to 6 staff.

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The Board passed a motion on July 16, 2019 which directed the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and DCFS to review staffing and resources available in the Antelope Valley offices in particular.

The OCP reviewed the staffing levels in the Antelope Valley regional offices as part of its review of the Anthony Avalos case, including an assessment of appropriate staffing ratios and adequate supervision of case-carrying social workers. The OCP reported on August 10, 2018 in its OCP Coordinated Response to the Anthony Avalos motion that “attrition in the Antelope Valley remains a significant challenge and is among the highest in DCFS.” The department-wide average length of service for a Children’s Social Worker (CSW) is 6.1 years, the average for Lancaster office is 4.8 years, and the Palmdale office is 3.9 years.

There is also a need for high-level tenured supervisors overseeing the Antelope Valley regional offices. Having supervisory staff with a long length of service is imperative to provide the needed leadership and oversight of the regional offices. Increasing supervision will allow for additional oversight of cases and staff and focus needed resources to this region.

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Better understanding the number of vacant positions, hiring practices, time-lapsed from initial interview to the offer, how staffs are on-boarded and oriented, reasons for transfers from the Antelope Valley DCFS offices, and strategic pipeline programs to fill and retain staff are of importance to understanding how to streamline and incentivize hiring effectively.

Financial Incentives

The department should review all available financial incentives and other creative ideas to ensure the staffing ratios in the Palmdale and Lancaster offices are decreased. On August 10, 2018, OCP informed the Board that DCFS plans to work with the CEO and the Department of Human Resources (DHR) to examine the possibility of using strategies such as initial assignment bonuses, long-term retention bonuses, transportation allowances, location-based pay differentials, and enhanced training and support. The November 14, 2018 OCP Coordinated Follow-Up To It's Anthony Avalos Report Recommendations stated that "DCFS' Bureau of Finance Administration has begun examining data to determine which offices are most difficult to staff and analyzing various compensation and frequency bonuses that could be used to alleviate these staffing disparities." Under existing policies, procedures, and guidelines from DHR, an existing location based bonus code for Antelope Valley assignments should be expanded for CSWs to provide additional compensation for those residing more than 30 miles from the region.

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Career Pathways/Workforce Development

DCFS shall work with DHR to launch a strong and sustainable plan for recruiting and hiring local talent in the Antelope Valley, including licensed social workers. Streamlined recruitment and career pathway programs geared to fill chronically hard to fill DCFS positions in the Antelope Valley should be explored by partnering with local academic institutions to address this issue over the long term, including tuition forgiveness for students in the Antelope Valley pursuing requisite degrees. DCFS contracts with UCLA, who in partnership with six Masters of Social Work programs in Los Angeles, recruits Masters of Social Work students who are interested in working in public child welfare for DCFS. This partnership exists to address this issue at a regional level and the contract program Principle Investigator should be consulted by this workgroup.

Continuous Quality Improvement

According to the State Audit, "The Department is in the process of designing a Quality Improvement (QI) division. The centralized division will have QI teams conducting ongoing, uniform comprehensive assessments of referrals and cases from all its regional offices and special programs to address CSW assessments and practice skills. The reviews will also evaluate the roles of supervisors and managers."

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The existing Quality Assurance section shall be expanded into a Continuous Quality Improvement section, and the staff should begin in earnest by conducting assessments and providing evaluations and training in the Palmdale and Lancaster offices as a priority to ensure staff and leadership there are provided with the necessary trainings and that cases and referrals have an additional level of review. This Continuous Quality Improvement section will provide a systemic structure that supports the consistent provision of quality case work practices by increasing the number of case reviews. This section will also aggregate and analyze findings and coach staff and leadership on strengths and areas for improvement on an ongoing basis.

I, THEREFORE MOVE, that the Board of Supervisors direct:

1. The CEO and the Director of DCFS to immediately work with DHR, Workforce Development, Aging and Community Services (WDACS), the Los Angeles County Workforce Development Board, and related labor partners, including SEIU Local 721 and to also consult with appropriate community stakeholders and academic institutions such as the Antelope Valley College, College of the Canyons, and California State University Bakersfield Antelope Valley.

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2. The mission is to develop a comprehensive and sustainable staffing plan with measurable outcomes, including but not limited to: local recruitment/hiring, retention, internships, financial incentives (i.e., location bonuses, pay differential, tuition forgiveness, etc.)

3. The CEO and DCFS shall submit their initial progress report in 45 days and every 30 days thereafter.

I, **FURTHER MOVE**, that the Board of Supervisors direct the Director of DCFS to immediately designate and fill a permanent, full-time position of Deputy Director, Service Bureau III, dedicated to the Antelope Valley and CEO to immediately take all necessary steps to support this action.

I, **FURTHER MOVE**, that the Board of Supervisors direct the CEO to immediately explore and consider salary options that can be implemented expeditiously to help reduce vacancies, support retention and continuity of social workers assigned to the Antelope Valley region and report back with recommendation/s within 30 days.

I, **FURTHER MOVE**, that the Board of Supervisors direct DCFS to immediately implement a Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) section and fill approximately 20 positions that will provide a systemic structure that supports the consistent provision of quality case work practices by increasing the number of case reviews, and begin by focusing on the Antelope Valley offices.

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