

MOTION BY SUPERVISORS JANICE HAHN
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Reimagining Safety Health and Human Services for the County's Children and Families

Black and indigenous families are over-policed and over-surveilled by our child-serving public systems. Los Angeles County's (County) child welfare and juvenile justice systems are the largest in the nation: 80 percent of probation youth in Los Angeles County come from families who have been investigated by our child welfare system. African American youth represent 40 percent of the County's youth in foster care, yet only comprise 10 percent of the County's total population (California Department of Finance 2018; Child Welfare Services 2020) and 85 percent of youth who experience commercial sexual exploitation and are institutionalized by our juvenile justice system are also foster youth; of this population, 71 percent are Black. In addition, most child removal cases are predicated on neglect allegations, with our system often conflating structural poverty with maltreatment. In fact, one-third of alleged child maltreatment cases stem from a family's inability to provide adequate food, clothing, shelter, or child supervision (No Going Back: Policies for an Equitable and Inclusive Los Angeles; USC Dornsife September 2020).

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We cannot push for a revolution of our child welfare system without addressing the complex intersectionality amongst the public systems that serve our youth and their families, and how they individually and collectively contribute to structural racism. The work of ensuring child well-being must focus on restoring, healing, and liberating communities of color who have been subjugated by our child welfare and adjacent systems for decades, as well as addressing both the social and structural determinants of child and family well-being.

On May 21, 2019, the Board of Supervisors (Board) voted to create an Office of Equity within the Department of Children and Family Services to end disparities within the foster care system. On July 21, 2020, this Board unanimously voted to establish an anti-racism agenda and initiative for the County by recognizing that “racism against Black people has reached crisis proportions that result in large disparities in family stability, health and wellbeing, education, employment, economic development, public safety, criminal justice and housing.” The Board’s next critical step is to address systemic racism and child safety at the community level and in our social and health services departments to support families long before any alleged maltreatment has occurred.

The Board also established the Office of Child Protection (OCP), in 2015, upon recommendation of the Board-established Blue Ribbon Commission on Child Protection. The OCP is completing the fourth year of its 2016-2021 Strategic Plan which focused on five priority areas: prevention, safety, permanency, well-being, and cross-cutting approaches. Some of the OCP’s accomplishments under this Strategic Plan include the expansion of the Prevention and Aftercare network services for families referred to the child protection hotline; the creation of a plan for a universal home-visiting model for all

new mothers; the launch of an electronic data-sharing mechanism across seven County Departments; and the expansion of a family-finding initiative to identify homes of relatives and close family friends for children who need to be placed in out-of-home-care.

As part of the planning process for the OCP's next five years, we must identify our highest priorities moving forward, with recognition of the lasting impacts of a global pandemic, the ensuing economic downturn, demands for social justice and systemic change, and the overall structural inequalities that define the lives of too many of the County's residents. Considering both how successful the OCP has been in achieving the goals of its current Strategic Plan and the Board's commitment to addressing institutional racism, the timing is ideal to review the role and structure of the OCP. The OCP could become the cornerstone of a new child well-being system, one that redefines child safety and helps eliminate systemic racism in our health and social service departments.

We must also consider the funding opportunity presented by the Families First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA), the Federal government's investment in prevention and family strengthening as an essential means of keeping children out of the child welfare system. Examples of this include but are not limited to, a focus on keeping biological families together through increased investment in social services and addressing poverty (housing, food security, basic income, etc.) and divesting from family separation programs/foster care system. As the County begins to implement FFPSA, we have an opportunity to move beyond child protection and toward ensuring that all children and families in our County can thrive, regardless of their race or economic status. Due to this changing landscape and the myriad opportunities to reimagine child welfare on the horizon, it is imperative that the Board of Supervisors provide strategic direction to guide

child welfare reform.

WE, THEREFORE MOVE that the Board of Supervisors direct the Acting Chief Executive Officer to identify a consultant to assess how the County's current child abuse prevention efforts can more effectively address racial inequities and systemic racism. The consultant will work with the Executive Director of Racial Equity, as well as all relevant departments and entities including but not limited to, the Department of Children and Family Services, the Alliance for Health Integration, the Commission for Children and Families, the Youth Commission, and the Office of Child Protection (OCP) to submit a written report to the Board within 120 days that will include the following:

1. Recommendations for how to include the expertise of community members, especially people who have lived experience with the County's health and social service programs, in the planning, design, implementation, and continuous quality improvement of prevention systems and services;
2. A scan of funding streams to identify both the benefits and challenges within each County entity currently dedicated to prevention and early intervention services and supports, and to make recommendations for how such funding streams could be braided and leveraged to expand the prevention and early intervention system, including the intricacies/challenges of braided funding with the Family First Prevention Services Act;
3. A scan of local and national best practices for eliminating implicit and structural bias and racism in health and social service agencies to help facilitate development of policy practice and service delivery that will more effectively reduce entry into the child protection while improving life outcomes for children and families who are at risk of

entering the County's child protection system;

4. An internal equity audit that will help to culturally align the workforce of the OCP with the population it serves; and
5. A scan of local and national best practices to enhance the collaborative work of the *Thriving Families, Safer Children* grant, which lifts up maltreatment prevention as an essential component of a more robust and comprehensive equitable child family well-being system. The scan should include a review of and recommendations on policies, procedures, processes, practices, and the infrastructure by which service delivery is provided, to help make these systems work more cohesively and collaboratively.

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