

MOTION BY SUPERVISOR HOLLY J. MITCHELL

May 4, 2021

**Supporting Innovative Mentorship Programs for At-Risk Black Male Youth in South Los Angeles**

Los Angeles County’s (County) child welfare system, like many other jurisdictions across the country, disproportionately impacts Black children. Black children are nearly twice as likely as white children to be referred to child protective services, to experience a substantiated instance of maltreatment, and to enter foster care. Since 1999, 45% of all Black children born in the County have been referred to child protective services by the age of 18. In 2018, while Black children comprised only 7% of the total County child population, they accounted for 24% of the children in foster care.

Research shows that Black male children in foster care after age 12 are less likely to be adopted or reunified. As a result, they are more likely than other foster youth to remain in the foster care system throughout their entire childhood. “Aging out” of foster care coincides with higher rates of unemployment, contact with the criminal justice system, and poor health outcomes.

Data further indicates that the County’s juvenile justice system also disproportionately impacts Black young males, in particular. Black male youth are disproportionately arrested in comparison to their White and Latinx counterparts. In 2015, Black youth accounted for 24% of all youth arrests while only comprising 7% of the County’s population. Forty five percent (45%) of foster youth with pending juvenile justice cases are Black and 63% of those are Black males.

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Our County must provide focused proactive, innovative and integrated resources and approaches to serve the Black male youth who are in foster care, so they successfully transition from adolescence to adulthood.

The Friends of the Children is a nonprofit service provider that matches paid professional mentors, called “friends”, with at-risk children and remains connected with matched children from kindergarten through high school graduation. The County’s Department of Mental Health (DMH) has previously partnered with Friends of the Children – Los Angeles (Friends LA) to expand their programming to the Antelope Valley (AV) to successfully support children and families in the child welfare system in that underserved community.

Friends LA has partnered with the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS), the County’s My Brother’s Keeper (MBK) Initiative, and the Center for Strategic Partnerships (Center) to develop a set of trauma-informed, culturally relevant and developmentally appropriate services, through a program called the Fostering Resilience Project. The Fostering Resilience Project (Project) will use professionally trained mentors to provide one-to-one support over three years to three hundred (300) black male youth. The Project’s goal is to provide enduring support to help at-risk Black male youth develop into thriving adults and prevent and reduce their contact with law enforcement. The Project will focus on Black youth in foster care in South Los Angeles, home to the County’s largest concentration of Black male youth in foster care. Black youth in South Los Angeles are disproportionately represented in youth arrests, school suspensions and expulsions.

The DCFS Vermont Corridor office, which provides services to approximately 800 Black male youth of all ages each year, will serve as the pilot site. The Project will focus on youth ages twelve through eighteen and older. The first year of the pilot will be funded by the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation. The Center and Friends LA will continue to search for further philanthropic support and other funds to sustain this important work.

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**I THEREFORE, MOVE THAT THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS:**

1. Delegate authority to the Director of the Department of Mental Health (DMH) to amend DMH's existing contract agreement with Friends of the Children Los Angeles (Friends LA) to add \$500,000 in funding to support the Fostering Resilience Project in South Los Angeles. The amended agreement will support the development and implementation of the pilot project that will enhance supports for 100 Black male youth for one year in South Los Angeles, ages twelve to eighteen;
2. Direct the Executive Officer of the Board of Supervisors (Board) to send a thank you letter to the Hilton Foundation on behalf of the Board to acknowledge the Foundation's \$500,000 philanthropic donation for the Fostering Resilience project; and
3. Instruct DMH to collaborate with Friends LA to identify appropriate prevention outcome measures to evaluate project success.

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(YV/KD/ME)