

MOTION BY SUPERVISORS SHEILA KUEHL  
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June 22, 2021

**Tailoring Services and Programs for LGBTQ+ Foster Youth**

Over the past few years, the Board of Supervisors (Board) has repeatedly expressed its strong support for enhanced, specialized services for LGBTQ+ youth, with particular attention to those who are involved in the County’s child welfare system, which is overseen by the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS). LGBTQ+ youth are overrepresented in this system, owing in large part to rejection and mistreatment by their families. Nearly 20% of foster youth in our LA County system identify as LGBTQ+. This means that there are well over 6,000 young people—if not many more in the larger systems—who are part of this community.

The following motions approved by the Board since 2018 represent only a portion of the many actions taken by the Board to address longstanding gaps in support for LGBTQ+ foster youth:

- 1) Supporting and Serving Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer or Questioning Youth (Supervisors Kuehl & Solis, January 9, 2018).

**MOTION**

MITCHELL \_\_\_\_\_

KUEHL \_\_\_\_\_

HAHN \_\_\_\_\_

BARGER \_\_\_\_\_

SOLIS \_\_\_\_\_

- 2) Leveraging Community Partners to Recruit and Retain Resource Families for Children in Foster Care (Supervisors Solis & Kuehl, April 9, 2019).
- 3) Assessing Progress & Continuing Support for LGBTQ+ Youth (Supervisors Kuehl & Solis, April 30, 2019).
- 4) Equity for LA County Families and Children in Foster Care (Supervisors Solis & Kuehl, May 21, 2019).
- 5) Responding to the Immediate Need to Support Foster Youth Who Identify as LGBTQ+ (Supervisors Solis & Kuehl, September 24, 2019).

The creation of the Office of Equity within DCFS was an important step in confronting persistent inequities and lack of services experienced by LGBTQ+ foster youth (many of whom are youth of color, as the system disproportionately impacts Black and Brown residents), but a great deal more must be done to even begin to provide adequate support to this subpopulation, whose unique needs require tailored resources, and, without which they are at risk for serious setbacks.

The motions referenced above, which were unanimously approved, include a variety of directives instructing DCFS to improve services and outcomes for LGBTQ+ foster youth and their caregivers. These motions also directed DCFS on several occasions to direct the funding necessary to support LGBTQ+ foster youth. As a start, DCFS has initiated one-time trainings. The department must immediately expand its efforts and prioritize other strategies, many of which have already been adopted by the Board. These strategies anchor the development of substantive, targeted services. The Department should reexamine prior directives that will reorient its efforts and facilitate forward movement in this work, including:

- Creating and implementing prevention and intervention services that minimize family rejection when such services are necessary and identify supportive and affirming homes for placement;
- Integrating services and youth development programs that focus on permanency and well-being, and which establish independent life skills that take into consideration specific challenges and discrimination faced by youth who identify as LGBTQ+; and
- Utilizing best practices and innovative casework/treatment models that best meet the needs of these youth.

LGBTQ+ youth and their families (caregivers, extended family, and chosen family) involved with DCFS urgently need specialized services and programs that address the distinctive issues they face—such as barriers to affirming mental health counseling and placements, an absence of LGBTQ+ providers who can help create trust and meaningful engagement, minimal support that is LGBTQ+ specific, and more. In addition, COVID-19 has dramatically impacted LGBTQ+ youth, jeopardizing their mental health, stable housing, food security, employment, and relationships. The pandemic has compounded pre-existing challenges, intensifying a pressing need for action that must be addressed.

**WE, THEREFORE, MOVE** that the Board of Supervisors direct the Department of Children and Family Services, in collaboration with the Chief Executive Office, and in consultation with subject matter experts from the LGBTQ+ community, to:

1. Report back to the Board in 30 days with a plan outlining services that will be implemented to address the aforementioned gaps, for example, a 24/7 helpline for LGBTQ+ foster youth who are in crisis and need support, a dedicated unit of social workers within DCFS that specializes in working with this population, and a recruitment and retention program for resource families;

2. Identify funding sources and an amount that will immediately be utilized to begin addressing gaps in services for the LGBTQ+ youth population with DCFS involvement; and
3. Create a plan to report back to the Board every 30 days for six months with an update on this work, followed by a report every six months for two years.

S:AJ/Tailoring Services and Programs for LGBTQ+ Foster Youth

