

MOTION BY SUPERVISOR HILDA L. SOLIS

January 11, 2022

**Creating a Child Welfare System for Children and Families of all Languages and Cultures**

Los Angeles County (County) has the largest child welfare system in the state of California and one of the largest nationwide. And with a growing population of diverse cultures and backgrounds, it is more crucial than ever to ensure the child welfare system is responsive to the unique needs of children, their families, and their communities. That means developing programs and supporting a workforce that deliver culturally responsive child welfare services.

In the County, we are fortunate that the Department of Children & Family Services (DCFS) workforce often reflects the children and families they serve. For example, approximately 27% of DCFS staff receive bonus pay for speaking Spanish. It is critical that these public servants be retained and supported given the language and cultural barriers families would face without their assistance. DCFS also established an American Indian Unit, which provides services to American Indian and Alaska Native

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children and families under the legal mandate of Indian Child Welfare Act as well as the Asian Pacific Program, which is staffed to serve residents who speak the following languages: Cambodian (Khmer), Cantonese, Mandarin, Japanese, Korean, Tagalog and Vietnamese.

Additionally, however, it is important to recognize that DCFS has gaps in language proficiency and cultural competency that can only be addressed through partnerships with nonprofit organizations. Recently, *Comunidades Indígenas en liderazgo* (CIELO), which is Spanish for Indigenous Communities in Leadership, released a map highlighting the County's Indigenous communities, showing the number of residents who speak Indigenous languages across the County from Pico Union to Long Beach. These are communities integral to the fabric of our County, but often endure unacceptable language barriers making it hard to navigate systems. One of the greatest challenges the Indigenous communities face is demographic invisibility, given how often they are simply labeled as "Latino / Mexican," which makes justifying language services even harder. This extends to our child welfare system.

These issues are not limited to the Latino and Indigenous communities, but extend to Black, Muslim, and Asian American Pacific Islander communities as well. Organizations like Project Caring and Sharing (PCS) and Korean American Family Services (KFAM) are instrumental in bridging the cultural and language divide between communities and County services. KFAM is the nation's first and only API-focused foster family agency with services in Korean, Mandarin, Cantonese, Tagalog, and Vietnamese.

DCFS must support and enhance efforts to ensure all families are able to

effectively navigate the child welfare system, a system that is often traumatic for children and families, and should not be made more inequitable by language and cultural barriers.

**I, THEREFORE, MOVE** that the Board of Supervisors direct the Department of Children and Family Services to report back in 60 days with:

1. A plan to establish partnerships with nonprofit organizations that serve diverse communities. This must include a process for leveraging partner organizations when DCFS workers need language interpreters, particularly for Indigenous language speakers.
2. A plan to expand cultural awareness training for the DCFS workforce to assist them in better identifying Indigenous children and families.
3. An analysis of the languages spoken by the DCFS workforce, categorized by type of staff, and any gaps that must be addressed through hiring of new employees or partnerships with community-based organizations.
4. An analysis of how DCFS currently tracks Indigenous children and families served and recommendations for improving data collection.
5. The feasibility of instituting or increasing bilingual pay for the DCFS workforce.
6. A procedure to periodically conduct a data-driven assessment of DCFS' language and culture readiness, and how to address identified opportunities.

**I FURTHER MOVE** that the Board of Supervisors direct the Department of Children and Family Services, working with the Office of Immigrant Affairs in the Department of Consumer and Business Affairs, the Los Angeles City/County

Native American Indian Commission, the Los Angeles County Department of Arts and Culture, community-based organizations (e.g. CIELO, KFAM, and others), and stakeholders to review the services and programs offered to serve children and families in the child welfare system and report back with recommendations to reduce language and cultural barriers, enhance the American Indian Unit and the Asian Pacific Program, and strengthen the overall care and support of these children and families. This should be included in the 60-day report referenced above.

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