

MOTION BY SUPERVISORS LINDSEY P. HORVATH

JUNE 4, 2024

AND HILDA L. SOLIS

**Gender Affirming Resource Closets for LGBTQ+ Foster Youth throughout Los**

**Angeles County**

According to a study conducted by the Williams Institute in 2014, approximately 20% of foster youth—1 in 5—identify as LGBTQ+ and more than 90% of those individuals are youth of color. Other studies have indicated that as many as 30% of foster youth in California identify as LGBTQ+. We know that LGBTQ+ youth in the child welfare system have higher rates of suicide attempts, are higher risk of experiencing health and mental health problems into adulthood, are higher risk of using illegal drugs, contracting HIV and other STDs, and experience higher levels of depression. LGBTQ+ youth have a higher-than-average number of foster care placements, and are at a higher risk of being hospitalized or becoming homeless at some point in their lives.

The Board of Supervisors (Board) has taken action over the last ten years to build out support and services for LGBTQ+ youth in the child welfare system. The Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) has also focused on better serving these young people, creating the Office of Equity’s (OOE) LGBTQ+ program in 2020.

The OOE’s LGBTQ+ program has implemented tailored services for LGBTQ+ youth

**MOTION**

SOLIS \_\_\_\_\_

MITCHELL \_\_\_\_\_

HAHN \_\_\_\_\_

BARGER \_\_\_\_\_

HORVATH \_\_\_\_\_

throughout the County, engaged in training for DCFS staff, and has identified LGBTQ+ Champions, DCFS staff who are subject matter experts with a minimum of two Champions in each of DCFS' 21 regional offices as well as the specialized program. The OOE LGBTQ+ program created the department's first Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression (SOGIE) dashboard, which provides real-time aggregated data readily available for all DCFS staff which informs them of how youth with open DCFS cases identify as it relates to their sexual orientation, gender identity and sex assigned at birth. As of March 2023, 40-50% of all youth ages 12-21 have a documented SOGIE in the Child Welfare Services/Case Management System; over 5% of youth have self-identified as LGBTQ+, including nearly 500 LGBQ youth and 120 transgender, gender non-binary and gender non-conforming youth. The SOGIE database has been a critical tool to help DCFS understand more about the children in their care and as a way to guide engagement and support.

While we have made improvements in how we can better support LGBTQ+ youth, there is much more to be done. One outstanding need OOE has identified is access to gender-affirming products such as shapewear, make-up, and clothing. Gender affirming care can help reduce self-harm and mental health challenges in transgender people,<sup>1</sup> as well as those who are non-binary and gender non-conforming. Currently, dedicated funding or a clear referral source for these essential items has not been identified.

---

<sup>1</sup> Hughto JMW, Gunn HA, Rood BA, Pantalone DW. *Social and Medical Gender Affirmation Experiences Are Inversely Associated with Mental Health Problems in a U.S. Non-Probability Sample of Transgender Adults*. Arch Sex Behav. 2020 Oct;49(7):2635-2647.

The Pritzker Foster Care Initiative in partnership with Casey Family Programs is working to establish a network of resource closets at community-based organizations serving LGBTQ+ foster youth to fill in this gap. Beginning in the First and Third Districts where these community-based organizations have a strong presence, these closets will be accessible and free of charge for any foster youth so that they can easily get the gender affirming care products they need. The initial one-year pilot will fund four community-based organizations to help design the program and operate and supply the resource closets. Each organization will identify young people with lived experience to support the planning and implementation of the resource closets, ensuring that this work is informed by youth voice. The one-year pilot, which includes an evaluation component to track the program's success, will be fully funded by philanthropy. This exciting initiative presents a new way to support our LGBTQ+ young people with a critical need they have identified.

This innovative partnership is exactly the work the OOE should be exploring to better support our LGBTQ+ young people throughout Los Angeles County. We can and must do better to support our young people in foster care. We must listen to what they tell us they need, and take action to ensure they feel heard, supported, and secure.

**WE, THEREFORE, MOVE** that the Board of Supervisors:

1. Direct the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) to:
  - a. Collaborate with the Pritzker Foster Care Initiative and Casey Family Programs to implement the gender affirming resource closet pilot program;

- b. Inform all DCFS LGBTQ+ Champions about the pilot and provide DCFS staff with information on ways to access these resources that can be shared with child welfare-involved youth;
- c. In collaboration with the Chief Executive Office, identify permanent funding sources for future fiscal years to continue and expand gender affirming resource closets throughout Los Angeles County, with at least one in every SPA once the pilot is completed.

# # #

LPH:es