

MOTION BY SUPERVISORS LINDSEY P. HORVATH AND

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Reimagining the Office of Child Protection

Following the tragic death of Gabriel Fernandez a decade ago, the Los Angeles County Blue Ribbon Commission on Child Protection (BRC) issued their final report *The Road to Safety for Our Children* (Report). The Report encompassed several recommendations, including immediate action steps the Board of Supervisors (Board) should take to ensure the safety and wellbeing of children throughout Los Angeles County (County). One recommendation was to create a new body to oversee one unified child protection system, noting “it is critical that one entity be responsible and accountable for the wellbeing of the child as a whole and that this entity have no other competing responsibilities. This entity must have the authority to recommend to the Board movement of resources and staff across relevant County departments.”

The Board adopted the BRC’s recommendations on June 10, 2014, including the creation of the Office of Child Protection (OCP), though it was not bestowed with the powers or oversight envisioned by the BRC. Instead, the OCP was housed within the Executive Office, reporting to the Board directly, with no budgetary authority.

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Over the last decade, the OCP's work has focused on prevention, safety, permanency, well-being, and cross-cutting approaches, all related to children and families in or at risk of entering the child welfare system. It has taken on several different and important roles, including those of a convenor, thought leader, facilitator, consensus-builder, project designer, manager, implementer, and evaluator among others. The OCP has taken a lead role in efforts involving complex care youth, school stability and family finding. It drafted the County's first Prevention Plan and has continued to be a key partner in the prevention and promotion space. While the OCP has been successful, it has not and does not have the oversight function the BRC found to be so necessary and critical.

Since the creation of the OCP in 2014, the world has drastically changed. In the last several years, the Board committed to advancing a "Care First, Jails Last" vision, focused on direct community investments, building up supportive services, and funding alternatives to incarceration. The Board has prioritized racial equity, creating the Anti-Racism, Diversity and Inclusion Initiative and adopting a racial equity strategic plan, and has emphasized the importance for [reimagining child welfare and safety](#) with these equity principals in mind. The Board has focused on prevention and promotion, adopting several motions focused on expanding programs and services to support residents in their own communities before ever encountering County systems. We have reduced our child welfare population from over 30,000 to less than 23,000 as of March 2024, and through the work of the County's Mandated Supporter Initiative, continue to build up community-based supports while we ensure the safety and security of our young people. The language in the child welfare space has also evolved. Now is the time to

truly recognize and acknowledge that our families do not need protection from themselves, but instead, they need holistic supports, better coordination, healing, and justice. The County's children and families need and deserve the opportunity to be empowered so they can thrive.

We have also seen great changes at the state level related to issues of children and families. AB 2083 requires every county to develop and implement a memorandum of understanding outlining the roles and responsibilities of the various local entities that serve children and youth in foster care who have experienced severe trauma. While the legislation initially focused on the child-welfare system, counties can expand the focus of their System of Care (SOC) to ensure that all public programs for children, youth, and families provide services in an integrated, comprehensive, culturally responsive, and evidence-based/best-practice manner. The County has chosen to do so, and the OCP has been tasked with bringing stakeholders, including the Departments of Children and Family Services, Mental Health, Public Health, Health Services, Public Social Services, Probation and Youth Development as well as the Los Angeles County Office of Education, the Superior Court, and the seven Regional Centers together on a regular basis to carry out this work.

In 2022, the California Department of Health Care Services launched California Advancing and Innovating Medi-Cal (CalAIM), a multiyear health care initiative that seeks to improve the quality of life and health outcomes of managed care Medi-Cal members by implementing broad delivery system, program, and payment reform across the Medi-Cal program. CalAIM's prevention focus and emphasis on addressing unmet social needs and care coordination through the Enhanced Care Management (ECM)

benefit and Community Supports Services has the potential to improve outcomes for children, youth, and families particularly those in our child welfare system or at-risk of entering the child welfare system. This Board has [taken action](#) to examine how ECM and Community Supports can be utilized to ensure better care for our young people in the child welfare system, and continues to explore opportunities to coordinate across departments to draw down CalAIM funding for our children, youth, and families.

As the OCP reaches its tenth anniversary, and nears the end of their existing Strategic Plan, now is the time to reflect on its accomplishments and challenges it has faced in implementation of systems improvement recommendations. In the current moment, as we build out our prevention ecosystem and focus on strengthening families and communities while always prioritizing child safety and equity, the OCP must adapt so that we can make sure we are truly empowering and supporting our children and families.

WE, THEREFORE, MOVE that the Board of Supervisors:

1. Direct the Office of Child Protection (OCP) to report back in 180 days in writing to the Board of Supervisors with the following:
 - a. Conduct a comprehensive review of the original vision and intent for the Office of Child Protection based on the recommendations made by the Blue Ribbon Commission including, but not limited to:
 - i. How OCP fulfilled the recommendations adopted by the Board;
 - ii. Which recommendations remained unfulfilled;
 - iii. What barriers to recommendations implementation exist; and
 - iv. Which areas need to be strengthened.

- b. List of OCP's accomplishments;
 - c. Create a five-year strategic plan and framework which encompasses and centers child and family wellbeing;
 - d. Make recommendations on expanding the OCP's scope and possible restructuring to include all children and families within the County that is rooted in Systems of Care (SOC) for Children and Youth, including but not limited to
 - i. CalAIM redesign;
 - ii. Health integration with behavioral health and substance use, homelessness and housing services, access to social services; etc.
 - iii. Recommendations for new nomenclature that reflects the County's focus on serving families and children throughout all our communities equitably and holistically.
2. Direct OCP to collaborate with the Los Angeles County Prevention & Promotion Systems Governing Committee, System of Care partners and stakeholders including but not limited to community-based organizations, children and family advocates, and labor partners in these efforts.
3. Direct all County departments participating in the System of Care work, including but not limited to the Departments of Children and Family Services, Mental Health, Public Health, Health Services, Public Social Services, Probation and Youth Development, to work with OCP to fully implement this work.

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