

MOTION BY SUPERVISOR JANICE HAHN

AGENDA NO.
September 24, 2024

Implementing a Pilot Project to Advance a Countywide Preventative Legal Advocacy Model for Child Welfare

The Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors (Board) is committed to promoting fair and equitable access to legal services in Los Angeles County (County) and has taken many actions to further this priority. As a result of such actions by the Board, the County has implemented rent and eviction counseling services to landlords and tenants; established referrals pathways for immigration-related legal matters; developed and funded Countywide Self-Help Legal Centers; and supported growth and innovation in the offices of the Public Defender and the Alternate Public Defender.

The Board has also recognized that providing legal services at the earliest opportunity possible is critical to ensuring fair and equitable legal proceedings. On May 17, 2022, the Board unanimously passed a motion entitled "[Advancing a Countywide Pre-Petition Advocacy Model for Child Welfare](#)" which, among other things, directed the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) to enlist a consultant, engage community and stakeholders, and report back to the Board on the feasibility of creating a pre-petition advocacy model in the County's child welfare system. As laid out in the motion, the Board adopted those directives based on its belief that "preventative legal advocacy is critical in keeping families together, keeping children at home, and preventing the need for foster care." The motion also acknowledged that "by providing prevention services and legal remedies for

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low-risk issues (such as counseling, respite care, help with evictions, protective orders, etc.), this model results in reducing the trauma of unnecessary child and family separation and reducing the disproportionate number of black and brown families that become system involved.”

A consultant team, comprised of Casey Family Programs and two national experts on pre-petition legal advocacy programs (CFP Consultant Team), carried out the Board’s directives, including hosting a series of meetings and focus groups with community and stakeholders. The CFP Consultant Team developed a short list of the necessary components in a preventative legal advocacy model for the County:

- (1) Hotline/Warmline: A hotline where families can receive concrete, current legal advice and learn of their rights before and/or during an investigation of allegations of child abuse and neglect by Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS), which will ensure families understand what is happening and are prepared to partner with DCFS if the agency needs to take action to ensure child safety.
- (2) Legal Representation Pilot Project: In-depth support and legal assistance to “targeted populations” experiencing specific challenges. Families in the “targeted populations” should receive support from a multidisciplinary team of parent partners, attorneys, and social workers to guide them through the investigatory process. Targeted populations that would benefit most from this more intensive support are families impacted by domestic violence and/or families where an infant is born substance exposed.

(3) Network of Services: Staff from the agency operating the Hotline/Warmline would partner with DCFS to ensure families calling the Hotline/Warmline have access to the same network of prevention and aftercare service providers used by the Child Protection Hotline to refer families when an allegation is screened out at the Child Protection Hotline stage. The network should also include formal relationships with legal service providers.

On April 18, 2023, in a related motion entitled [“Expediting Prevention Services and Supports for Family First Prevention Services State Block Grant Funding,”](#) the Board directed DCFS to enter into a Funding Agreement (Agreement) with the Center for Strategic Partnership’s fiscal agent, Southern California Grantmakers (SCG), to facilitate an expedited funding pathway to community-based organizations and legal service providers to implement ten prevention and promotion pilot services and supports. The Hotline/Warmline recommended by the CFP Consultant Team is one of the pilots approved as part of the SCG Agreement.

The CFP Consultant Team continues to engage and receive feedback from DCFS, legal partners, and stakeholders. As this process unfolds, DCFS is ready to implement the third component recommended by the CFP Consultant Team – a pilot to establish a network of legal services providers.

I, THEREFORE, MOVE that the Board of Supervisors direct the Director of the Department of Children and Family Services to:

1. Amend, as needed, the Agreement with the Southern California Grantmakers (SCG) authorized by the Board on the April 18, 2023, for the development and implementation of the Preventive Legal Services Hub and Warmline to increase

the provision of prevention services. The Agreement will be effective upon execution through September 30, 2025.

2. Provide SCG \$1,070,000, using \$856,000 Family First Transition Act funds and \$214,000 State Block Grant and cover the associated administrative fee of three percent.

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