

REVISED MOTION BY SUPERVISOR HOLLY J. MITCHELL

January 6, 2026

Expanding Wolf Therapy to Underserved and At-Risk Youth

Wolf Connection supports at-risk youth in the Antelope Valley by helping them heal from trauma through connection, nature, and the human–animal bond. Founded in 2009, this 501(c)(3) nonprofit is a global leader in restorative human–animal relationships, using its pioneering model known as Wolf Therapy.

The program’s effectiveness is supported by pre- and post-program surveys, staff observations, and youth feedback, with key outcomes including emotional regulation, interpersonal skills, school engagement, and connection to nature. Wolf Connection’s virtual platform and in-person programs enable ongoing assessment, providing Los Angeles County (County) with data-informed tools to strengthen and extend trauma-sensitive services.

In partnership with Claremont University’s Psychology Department, Wolf Connection’s program evaluation found youth participants consistently demonstrated strong emotional and behavioral engagement, which increased over the course of their participation. The evaluation found students showed the most meaningful shifts in behavior and attitude during activities involving direct interactions with wolves, exploring their individual journeys, and engaging in shared challenges. Many participants developed lasting bonds with both the animals and their peers while internalizing Wolf Connection’s core principles of respect, accountability, and self-reflection.

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MOTION

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The “Increase in Resilience through Coping Skills” outcome category showed a 39% improvement, indicating that youth strengthened their perspective, empathy, and ability to recover emotionally. Both virtual and on-site participants reported increased self-awareness, resilience, and a stronger sense of belonging, reinforcing the program’s positive impact on youth well-being. Many expressed appreciation that the campus connected them with nature. One youth shared, “My experience at Wolf Connection helped ground my mind and body. I can see my true self and understand how to be better. Another said, “I feel connected with the wolves and staff. They helped me understand and overcome my fears and struggles.” Educators and case workers also reported decreased disciplinary issues and improved classroom engagement following program participation.

On May 21, 2024, the Board of Supervisors directed the Department of Mental Health (DMH), in collaboration with the Anti-Racism, Diversity, and Inclusion (ARDI) Initiative, to review the feasibility of expanding Wolf Therapy – Power of the Pack to other high need areas of the County¹. While expansion was not feasible at that time, DMH has remained committed to working with Wolf Connection to propose service expansion in high need areas, as determined through the Chief Executive Office Equity Explorer Tool, the Concentrated Disadvantage Index, and the Opportunity Youth Index. Through this analysis, DMH, in collaboration with the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS), identified Service Areas 1 (Antelope Valley), 2 (San Fernando Valley) and 6 (South Los Angeles) as high-need areas.

DMH has partnered with DCFS to utilize Flexible Family Support (FFS) funds to expand Wolf Connection services to youth in out-of-home placement, ages 14 through 21. FFS provides one-time funding for activities that help stabilize placements and promote the well-being of children and youth in foster care or extended foster care (non-minor dependents). These funds support experiences that build skills, foster healing, and strengthen relationships, contributing to emotional growth, self-esteem, and stability.

DMH estimates that the expanded program will serve approximately 150 youth in person at the ranch. In addition, DCFS will support the program by providing

¹ <https://file.lacounty.gov/SDSInter/bos/supdocs/191705.pdf>

transportation for the youth to and from the Wolf Connection camp, as stipulated in the Board Motion. DMH will receive referrals from DCFS and will work directly with agencies that serve foster youth in out-of-home placement.

I THEREFORE MOVE THAT THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS:

1. Approve and authorize the Director of the Department of Mental Health (Director), or designee, to prepare, sign, and execute an amendment to the existing contract with Spring Evolution Inc., dba Wolf Connection (Wolf Connection) to increase the Total Contract Amount (TCA). The amendment will be effective upon Board approval and will increase the contract by \$260,000 for Fiscal Year (FY) 2025-26, with a revised TCA of \$1,700,000, fully funded by Intrafund Transfers (IFT) from the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS). The amendment will be used to ~~fund program~~ expand the program in high needs areas as identified through analysis of data from ~~determined by analyzing the data in~~ the Chief Executive Office (CEO) Equity Index Tool and the DCFS Concentrated Disadvantage Index, and the COVID-19 Vulnerability and Recovery Index.
2. Delegate authority to the Director, or designee, to prepare, sign, and execute future amendments to the contract referenced in Recommendation directive 1. Such amendments may ~~to~~ revise the contract language; revise the TCA; add, delete, modify, or replace the Statement of Work; and/or reflect federal, State, and County regulatory and/or policy changes provided that: 1) any increase to the Board-approved TCA in Recommendation directive 1 will not exceed an increase of 20 percent from the Board approved TCA in Recommendation directive 1; and 2) sufficient funds are available. The amendments will be subject to prior review and approval as to form by County Counsel, with written notice to the Board and the CEO.
3. Delegate authority to the Director, or designee, to terminate the contract ~~described~~ referenced in Recommendation directive 1 in accordance with the contract's termination provisions, including Termination for Convenience. The

Director, or designee, will provide written notification to the Board and CEO of such termination action.

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(YV/EA)