

MOTION BY SUPERVISOR HOLLY J. MITCHELL

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Prioritizing Sibling Connections in Out-of-Home Care

Children who are removed from their parents due to abuse, neglect, or concerns for their safety are often placed in out-of-home care. In Los Angeles County (County), the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS), strives to keep siblings together whenever possible and to maintain family connections as part of a family-centered approach. However, due to placement challenges, resource constraints, and systemic barriers, many siblings are separated into different homes, reducing opportunities for meaningful contact and undermining the critical bonds that support children’s emotional well-being and developmental stability.¹

Under federal and California law, child welfare agencies are required to prioritize placing siblings together whenever possible. When joint placement is not feasible, agencies must actively arrange and maintain regular visitation and ongoing contact in a manner consistent with each child’s best interests. California Welfare and Institutions Code § 16002 affirms that sibling placement and ongoing interaction should be prioritized

¹ [Child Placement | Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services](#)

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unless doing so would compromise a child's safety or well-being.²

Despite these legal requirements, research shows that many children in separate placements do not receive regular sibling visits.³ Sibling relationships serve as vital sources of emotional support and identity continuity for children in out-of-home care. Between 53 % and 80 % of children in foster care with siblings are separated from one or more siblings, despite research showing that joint placements and frequent contact improve outcomes.⁴

According to the American Bar Association, children often desire more sibling contact than they receive. Research shows that 73.7 % of separated foster youth are placed apart from their siblings and many see them monthly or less. Alarming, nearly 30% never have contact at all despite wanting more frequent visits. Sibling separation is associated with increased feelings of loss, anxiety, and stress, as well as decreased self-esteem and sense of belonging.⁵ Failure to prioritize regular visitation can compound pre-existing trauma, exacerbating emotional distress and hindering adjustment to placement.⁶

Sibling separation is also linked to instability in placement experiences. Children placed with siblings are less likely to experience placement disruptions and tend to demonstrate more stable adjustment across care settings.⁷ Placement with at least one sibling, or frequent visitation when joint placement is not possible, is associated with reduced emotional and behavioral difficulties as well as improved school performance and overall well-being.⁸

To reinforce sibling bonds, promote stability, and ensure alignment with research, statutory requirements, and best-practice principles, the County must advance approaches that prioritize co-placement and sustain consistent sibling contact when joint placement cannot be achieved.

² [California Welfare and Institutions Code § 16002 \(2025\) :: 2025 California Code :: U.S. Codes and Statutes :: U.S. Law :: Justia](#)

³ [The complex relationship between sibling contact and child and family well-being in foster care: An exploration of child and family functioning in a pre-permanency cohort - ScienceDirect](#)

⁴ [Joint Sibling Placements – Casey Family Programs](#)

⁵ [The Importance of Sibling Relationships for Children in Foster Care | Journal of the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law](#)

⁶ [Children desire more contact with siblings after separation.](#)

⁷ [Sibling Separation and Placement Instability for Children in Foster Care - PubMed](#)

⁸ [Working with Siblings in Foster Care Toolkit](#)

I THEREFORE MOVE THAT THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS:

1. Direct the Director of the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) to prepare recommendations for proposed policy changes and departmental actions that would result in a measurable increase in the co-placement of siblings in resource homes. Additionally, when co-placement is not possible, measure and recommend strategies to increase sibling visitation, while maintaining and where possible, enhancing scheduled visits, services and administrative requirements, and report back to the Board in writing in 120 days. Prioritize sibling placement and visitation in all recommendations.
2. Direct the Director of DCFS, in collaboration with contracted partners and relevant County departments, to explore and report back in writing in 120 days with recommendations to expand placement capacity and strengthen sibling co-placement and ongoing sibling connections through family- and community-based resources. Recommendations should include, but not be limited to:
 - a. Strategies to identify, recruit, and support placement resources capable of accommodating sibling sets, including relatives, non-relative extended family members (NREFMs), and community-based families.
 - b. Opportunities to strengthen partnerships with community-based organizations, faith-based institutions, and other local stakeholders to increase placement options and culturally responsive supports for sibling groups.
 - c. An assessment of how Foster Family Agencies and other placement providers can diversify or expand their service models to better support sibling co-placement and sustained sibling connections, including enhanced services, specialized training, flexible placement models, and identification of any associated funding needs.
 - d. Identification of regulatory, contractual, or funding barriers that limit placement capacity for sibling sets, along with recommendations to address those barriers, including any necessary funding enhancements or realignment of existing resources.
 - e. An assessment of the current implementation of the Family Finding and Engagement Program (FFEP), including Upfront Family Finding (UFF),

- particularly the timeliness and effectiveness of referrals made within 14 business days of detention, and opportunities to better align family finding efforts with early planning for sibling placement and visitation.
- f. Strategies to better engage and utilize relatives, NREFMs, and other supportive adults identified through FFEP/UFF to assist with transportation, supervision, and facilitation of sibling visits as a supplement to DCFS-provided visitation supports when siblings are placed separately.
 - g. Identification of policy, practice, or liability considerations related to the involvement of family members in supporting sibling visitation, along with recommendations to address any barriers.
 - h. Recommendations for training, supports, and, where appropriate, stipends or other resources to enable relatives and supportive adults to safely and consistently support sibling placement and visitation efforts.
 - i. Recommendations for pilot programs or innovative models that prioritize keeping siblings together or maintaining strong sibling connections when separation is unavoidable, including shared care models, hub-and-spoke placements, or community-based visitation supports.
 - j. High level metrics to evaluate the effectiveness of these strategies in increasing sibling co-placement rates and improving the frequency, consistency, and quality of sibling visitation and engagement.
 - k. Strategies to engage and support prospective adoptive parents, including those with approved or pending adoptive home studies, to facilitate and maintain sibling visitation and connections, particularly when siblings are not co-placed and/or are on separate permanency tracks.
 - l. Opportunities to partner with placement agencies, community-based organizations, and faith-based institutions to develop and sustain local and regional events, including family gatherings, camps, and other structured activities that promote ongoing sibling interaction, relationship-building, and connection among children, families, and caregivers.
3. Recommend departmental policy, programmatic, and process changes to increase sibling visitation through standardized case plans, court reports, and court orders

at the earliest appropriate stage of a custody case. Further, recommend how DCFS can provide transportation support, supervision resources, and accessible scheduling to increase sibling contact, including resources needed to achieve measurable increases in visitation for siblings in DCFS care who are placed in different homes and report back to the Board in writing in 90 days. Recommendations should include, but not be limited to:

- a. Updates to visitation policies and protocols to ensure they are trauma informed, culturally responsive, and developmentally appropriate.
 - b. Proposed additional training for staff, caregivers, and service providers on the psychological impacts of sibling separation and strategies to support positive, healing-centered sibling engagement.
 - c. Proposed metrics to demonstrate the impact of policy and program improvements, and how these metrics should be displayed in a publicly available dashboard to show baseline data and track progress over time (longitudinally) on sibling co-placement rates, visitation frequency and consistency, and barriers to visitation.
 - d. An assessment of how existing DCFS programs and resources, including, but not limited to Parent Institute Programs, Cultural Brokers, and the Fatherhood Initiative, can be leveraged or expanded to support and facilitate sibling visitation, particularly in cases involving high-conflict dynamics between custodial and non-custodial parents.
 - e. An evaluation of existing internal data systems and tools, including but not limited to Time2Connect and sibling placement reports, to improve tracking, monitoring, and reporting on the frequency, quality, and consistency of sibling visitation, and recommendations to enhance data transparency and accountability.
4. Direct the Director of DCFS to engage parents, siblings, relative caregivers, resource caregivers, advocates, attorneys, and youth with lived experience in the development of the proposed policy changes and sibling visitation plans, and include their feedback in the 90-day report back to the Board. Continue to engage this group in evaluating policy implementation to ensure practices reflect the needs

and voices of impacted families.

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