

**MOTION BY SUPERVISORS MARK RIDLEY-THOMAS AND
MICHAEL D. ANTONOVICH**

JUNE 18, 2013

ESTABLISHING A BLUE RIBBON COMMISSION ON CHILD PROTECTION

The Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) is charged with the safety and protection of neglected and abused children within Los Angeles County (County). In that role, it provides services to families and children in crisis through other County departments and community professionals. DCFS is responsible for ensuring that services are integrated and coordinated amongst all these entities for the ultimate safety of the children in its care.

Once again, DCFS is under scrutiny for alleged mismanagement of Foster Family Agency contracts, and for the recent death of Gabriel F., (age 8), who was allegedly tortured and abused by his mother and her boyfriend. In Gabriel F.'s case, there appear to have been repeated reports of abuse and neglect preceding his death. Just four years ago, Dae'von B., (age 6), was found dead in his home despite repeated reports of abuse in the preceding months. Two years ago, Erica J., (age 2), died of

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MOTION

MOLINA _____

YAROSLAVSKY _____

KNABE _____

ANTONOVICH _____

RIDLEY-THOMAS _____

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massive trauma inflicted by her mother's boyfriend. DCFS had determined that leaving the child in the mother's care was a "high" risk, but failed to remove her because allegations of abuse were unfounded.

These tragic incidents are not new to the Board of Supervisors (Board). As far back as 1984, in an effort to maximize child protection accountability, the Board established the Commission for Children and Families. In 1996, the Board established the Children's Services Inspector General, the predecessor entity to the Children's Special Investigation Unit (CSIU), which was established in 2008. In 2010, the Board also called for improved collection of data on child fatalities, and ordered improvements to enable social workers to access vital data on children in danger. In 2011, the Board voted to directly oversee DCFS.

In 2012, CSIU issued a lengthy report identifying systemic flaws in the County's child protection safety network. The CSIU report on 13 child fatality incidents cited poor investigations, followed by poor decision making, failed communications, and finally, lax supervision and management within DCFS as "Recurring Systemic Issues", which caused deadly failures in the County's child protection duties. The recurring problems identified by CSIU appear to have been factors in the alleged mishandling of Gabriel F.'s case.

There is widespread agreement among the Board, DCFS leadership, social workers and citizen activists that the child welfare system and the manner of

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investigating critical cases of child abuse is dysfunctional. The current system does not serve the best interests of the child, the family or the community at large.

Further, there is widespread agreement that child safety investigations can be improved by better training, management, support for and accountability of social workers, as well as improved communications between schools, police agencies, probation staff, DCFS and other key stakeholders in the County's child safety network.

Notwithstanding the absence of controversy over the need for such reforms, the results of the County's attempts to implement are unclear or arguably inadequate.

Since 2008, the Board has passed over a hundred child safety motions. The CSIU through its work and previous studies by outside experts have prescribed numerous policies for improving the County's performance in handling critical child abuse incidents, as well as how to consistently serve the children under the County's responsibility. DCFS continues to work toward the implementation of its strategic plan but these efforts have and continue to fall short of expectations.

It is now time for the Board to seek an independent review of the obstacles to effectively execute much needed child protection reforms through the appointment of a Blue Ribbon Commission on Child Protection (Commission).

WE THEREFORE MOVE THAT THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS:

1. Create a Blue Ribbon Commission on Child Protection. Two members shall be appointed by each Supervisor by July 1, 2013. The Commission's

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mandate shall include the following:

- a. Review previously delayed or failed efforts to implement reforms and provide recommendations for a feasible plan of action to expeditiously implement needed reforms;
 - b. Review the systemic, structural and organizational barriers to effective performance. These may include such factors as the current structure, scope of DCFS and relevant County departments, including the departments of Health Services, Mental Health, Public Health, and Sheriff, the District Attorney, the Dependency Court and commissions, various memoranda of understanding, and the relationship of DCFS to the Board;
and
 - c. Review, at its discretion, the child protection failures, including DCFS policies and cases.
2. Authorize DCFS and all relevant County agencies, County Counsel and the Chief Executive Officer to provide full cooperation to the Commission, including access to personnel records and other records to the fullest extent allowed by law;
 3. Direct the Executive Officer of the Board, County Counsel and the Chief Executive Officer to recommend a staffing and funding plan for the

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Commission, including provisions for office space and equipment. The staff shall combine dedicated paid staff with pro bono professional support as well as assistance from County administrative staff. The Commission members shall serve for six months with the request that they submit their recommendations to the Board in writing by the end of this calendar year. After which, the commission will sunset.

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