



April 3, 2025

County Reforms and Policy Changes Addressing Sexual Abuse of Minors

Over the past two and half decades, Los Angeles County has enacted and continues to enact systemic safeguards to protect young people in its care. This fact sheet summarizes reforms and policy changes involving the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) and the Probation Department.

- The Department of Children and Family Services has greatly reduced the use of group facilities—such as MacLaren Children’s Center, which was permanently closed in 2003—to emphasize home-based foster care when possible, and with [extensive wrap-around mental services](#) now mandated by state law.
- Congregate care settings are used only when the level of care required for youth with complex needs cannot be met in a family-like home. And the model has shifted to [short-term residential treatment programs](#) (known by the acronym STRTPs) with resources available to youth with complex needs. Moreover, changes to federal policy now dictate that a qualified mental health professional must complete an assessment to determine if a youth in foster care requires STRTP placement. Currently, DCFS has fewer than 200 young people living in such facilities.
- In 1999, Los Angeles County established a Children Services Ombuds Office to advocate on behalf of children in group homes and investigate allegations of abuse within the child welfare system. This body, now renamed [LA County Ombudsman for Youth in STRTPs](#), has the authority to conduct unannounced inspections and access all necessary records to ensure compliance with safety protocols and advocate for youth based on identified concerns or needs.
- DCFS conducts comprehensive background checks during its hiring process and foster parent recruitment process, which includes Live Scan fingerprinting and use of the Rap Back system. The latter system alerts the department to new criminal records involving employees and foster parents. Employees are re-screened with each promotion.
- The department also enforces a strict code of conduct policy with zero tolerance for abuse and works closely with the Office of County Investigations and a multidisciplinary response team of law enforcement officers, child welfare professionals, medical experts and mental health counselors who collaboratively address abuse allegations, promoting a

holistic and victim-centered approach and hold individuals accountable when misconduct is substantiated.

More information about the timeline of DCFS reforms and major milestones can be found at these links:

[DCFS Milestones Timeline](#)
[DCFS Child Welfare Reforms](#)

- The Probation Department has a zero-tolerance policy regarding sexual assault and sexual harassment and remains committed to fostering a culture of safety and accountability for all the youth in its care.
- In the last several years, the department has revised or created more than 20 policies focused exclusively on preventing sexual abuse and identifying and protecting youth who may be vulnerable to abuse.
- These policies are consistent with federal Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA) standards and include comprehensive screening for risk of victimization and abusiveness, multiple internal and external reporting mechanisms, and ongoing staff training in trauma-informed practices and professional boundaries. The Department has appointed a PREA Coordinator and also has tasked its Compliance Officer with monitoring and enforcing these standards. These efforts are part of a broader strategy to enhance awareness, reporting and response measures, reinforcing the department's commitment to mitigating the risks of sexual abuse and harassment within its juvenile facilities.
- To supplement these ongoing efforts, Probation has retained a law firm to conduct a thorough review of policies and issues related to the AB 218 claims. That review is underway and is expected to lead to a series of best practices assessments and recommendations in the next few weeks.
- Systems have been established to track allegations of misconduct, review incidents and incorporate outcomes into continuous operational improvements, including:
 - All youth are advised at intake of the zero-tolerance policy; their right to be free from sexual abuse; the procedure for reporting abuse; and their right to be free from retaliation for reporting.
 - All Probation staff are trained on sexual abuse prevention within their first year of employment, and every two years thereafter.
 - Medical and mental health staff at Probation are trained in how to detect and treat sexual abuse, and how to report it.
 - All contract employees, vendors, and volunteers are provided written information on how to prevent and report sexual abuse.

- Staff of opposite gender must announce their presence when entering a housing unit and, absent an emergency, are prohibited from viewing youth of opposite gender as they shower, change clothing, or the like.
 - Any substantial expansion or modification of Probation facilities must consider the effect of facility design on Probation's ability to protect youth against sexual abuse.
 - Each facility entrance or public lobby provides instructions on how to report sexual abuse.
 - Probation uses a risk screening tool to (among other things) identify youth who may be at risk of sexual abuse, to allow measures to be taken to reduce this risk.
 - Youth can report sexual abuse via grievances; directly to Probation staff; to on-site medical or mental health providers; to an on-site ombudsperson; and via a telephone hotline posted within the housing units.
 - Probation's Special Investigations Unit responds to allegations of sexual abuse, and all investigations are reviewed jointly by Probation's Compliance Officer and PREA Coordinator to determine whether operational changes are necessary and to prevent retaliation against any reporters of sexual abuse.
 - Probation's Compliance Officer and PREA Coordinator conduct annual reviews of sexual abuse data to assess and improve the effectiveness of Probation's sexual abuse prevention and response.
- More information about the PREA policy, including educational materials for youth, can be found here: [PREA Zero Tolerance Policy](#).
 - The department strictly prohibits any type of sexual relationship with an individual under department supervision and considers such a relationship a serious breach of the standards of employee conduct and contract compliance.
 - Probation has improved hiring practices and enhanced background checks for all potential hires and has expanded training to ensure compliance with all department policies.
 - It has also created confidential reporting channels through the [establishment of an Ombudsperson](#) for youth or families to report misconduct without fear of retaliation and is committed to ensuring that those reports are reviewed and acted upon promptly.

Additional LA County milestones related to children and youth over the past decade include:

- 2015: The Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors and Chief Executive Office create the [Office of Child Protection](#) to improve communication, coordination and accountability across agencies involved in the child protection network so that vulnerable children have a better chance of growing up safer and healthier.

- 2020: Los Angeles County unveils its first [Foster Youth Bill of Rights](#) campaign to educate children and youth in foster care about their legal rights regarding housing placements, mental health resources, education and more.
- 2021: Los Angeles County creates its first-ever [Youth Commission](#) to elevate the voices of young people with lived expertise in foster care to inform policies at the county level.