

SANTA BARBARA COUNTY BOARD AGENDA LETTER



Clerk of the Board of Supervisors
105 E. Anapamu Street, Suite 407
Santa Barbara, CA 93101
(805) 568-2240

Agenda Number:
Prepared on: 3/15/06
Department Name: Social Services
Department No.: 044
Agenda Date: 4/18/06
Placement: Departmental
Estimate Time: 15 minutes
Continued Item: NO
If Yes, date from:

TO: Board of Supervisors

FROM: Kathy Gallagher, Director
Social Services Department

STAFF CONTACT: Ken Jensen, Psy. D.
Deputy Director x7312

SUBJECT: Family Preservation and Protective Services Report

Recommendation(s):

That the Board of Supervisors:

1. Receive and accept the attached presentation regarding the Child Welfare Services Program, and
2. Approve the recommendation to add three full-time equivalent Social Service Practitioners (Range 5514, Job class 7052, \$3795-\$4633 per month) dedicated to Family Preservation services and one full-time equivalent Social Service Practitioner dedicated to Adoption services, effective July 1, 2006.

Alignment with Board Strategic Plan:

GOAL VII: FAMILIES AND CHILDREN. A Community that Fosters the Safety and Well-Being of Families and Children.

Executive Summary and Discussion:

Child Welfare Services are a combination of family preservation and protective services, which are mandated services in both federal and state law. These services are, however, significantly underfunded to meet present service needs. In the aggregate, the program is growing with a noticeable change in caseload complexity brought about in part by the growing methamphetamine epidemic and by increased dysfunctionality among the children served. More referrals are being substantiated; more resources, including staff, have been shifted to providing response and case management services. An unfortunate consequence is the adverse impact on prevention and early intervention programming.

The result is a steady and persistent increase in out-of-home placements into the foster care system, which has served to increase aggregate caseload and county costs significantly over the past two years. The attached presentation offers some data and a statistical overview of this growth in both caseload and costs.

Foster care is always the last alternative when deciding what is best for the child. However, it has increasingly become the only alternative for families where the parents are incapable of caring for their children due to chronic substance abuse, or even incarcerated due to drug crimes. Mental health issues are having an increasingly significant impact on foster care placements as well, as children are coming into the system with more severe behavioral and emotional damage. These children most often need high cost group home and therapeutic placements which are further impacting and increasing foster care placement expenditures.

Multiple initiatives have been, or are currently being executed, to control cost to the program while striving to provide safety, protection and permanency to the children served. Examples of proactive initiatives already implemented include the development of an assessment center at Devereux; expanded therapeutic foster care services through the assistance of ADMHS; secured grant funding targeted at locating relatives for children in need of placement; enhancement of the foster care program by adding a full time foster parent recruiter; secured the management tool Safe Measures; contracted out the Independent Living Program for emancipating youth; implemented Structured Decision Making which assesses risk and safety of families and children, and implemented the Board-approved "Systems Improvement Plan" which addresses child welfare services on a number of outcome measures.

The Department of Social Services, after consultation with the Chief Executive's Office, desires to implement two new efforts to mitigate the growth in foster care. This requires the addition of four highly skilled, masters level social workers, capable of working intensively with difficult family situations. Three full-time Social Service Practitioners would staff a family preservation program aimed at providing intensive services to families in their own home, avoiding the need to remove the children into foster care placement. A second initiative would require the addition of one full-time Social Service Practitioner to focus on Adoptions placements and finalizations, thus reducing the foster care caseload and costs. It is anticipated that the projected increase in funding needed for the foster care caseload would thereby be reduced, and would offset the cost of adding these new positions.

Mandates and Service Levels:

This will not change program mandates but will improve services levels in family preservation and adoption services.

Fiscal and Facilities Impacts:

The FY 06-07 cost of these additional 4 Social Service Practitioners is approximately \$280,000 in general fund dollars. Even with the anticipated reduction in Foster Care Assistance that will be generated with this new staff, we anticipate Foster Care Assistance needs to be approximately \$3.5 million higher than budgeted in FY 05-06. This \$3.5 million increase will be funded by Federal and State funds (\$2.2 million) and County funds (\$1.3 million). The additional appropriations, federal/state revenues and \$1.6 million (\$.3 million for staff and \$1.3 for assistance payments) in local funds have been included in the Department's FY 06-07 recommended budget.

Special Instructions:

Please send the signed personnel resolution to Duncan Thomas at DSS Human Resources and send a signed copy of the minute order to Attn: Paula Haines, Administration, Department of Social Services, 234 Camino del Remedio, Santa Barbara, CA 93110.

Concurrence:

County Executive Office
Auditor Controller