

Tuesday, September 2, 2008

Honorable Judge J. William McLafferty
Santa Barbara County Superior Court
1100 Anacapa Street, 2nd Floor
Santa Barbara, CA 93121-1107

**Board of Supervisors' Responses to Fiscal Year 2007-2008
Grand Jury Report on "Child Welfare Services: A System of Care that Lacks Stability"**

Dear Judge McLafferty:

During its regular meeting on Tuesday, September 9, 2008, the Board of Supervisors (Board) adopted the following as the Board's response to the 2007-2008 Report on "Child Welfare Services: A System of Care that Lacks Stability".

Finding 1: There is a lack of consistency and continuity of individuals responsible for children in foster care.

Response to Finding 1: The Board of Supervisors adopted the Department of Social Services' response and partially disagrees with this finding as the complexity of the Child Welfare System lends itself to the assignment of different social workers to manage different aspects of a child's case.

Finding 2: Many youths emancipating from foster care systems at age 18 are ill prepared to take care of themselves.

Response to Finding 2: The Board of Supervisors adopted the Department of Social Services' response and agrees with the finding. The Board of Supervisors acknowledges the work of the Department of Social Services and its partnering agencies in preparing foster care youth for emancipation.

Finding 3: There is an increasingly high turnover of social workers in Child Welfare Services. This finding was reported by the 2000-2001 Grand Jury. This situation still exists and is getting worse.

Response to Finding 3: The Board of Supervisors adopted the Department of Social Services and Human Resources' responses and partially disagrees with this finding. While there is a high level of turnover for social workers within Child Welfare Services, some of the turnover is attributable to promotions, retirements, and other factors outside of the Departments' control.

Finding 4: Santa Barbara Child Welfare Services does not always communicate well with group homes, foster parents and other child welfare providers.

Response to Finding 4: The Board of Supervisors adopted the Department of Social Services' response and partially disagrees with the finding. The Department has implemented strategies such as a liaison position between the Department and foster care providers, a Foster Parent Code of Conduct and attendance by Child Welfare Services staff at scheduled meetings with providers. However, the Department should continue to enhance its communication efforts with group homes, foster parents and other providers.

Finding 5: Over the past several years, due to the increase in methamphetamine abuse, there has been a significant increase in substantiated cases of child neglect and abuse, resulting in more children being placed in foster care.

Response to Finding 5: The Board of Supervisors adopted the Department of Social Services' response and agrees with the finding. The Board of Supervisors is cognizant of the methamphetamine epidemic and is a participating agency in the Methamphetamine Prevention Network, a coalition of organizations tasked with developing strategies to prevent the use of meth within the County.

Recommendation 1: *Social Services should devise a system whereby the change in the number of social workers responsible for any particular child is minimized.*

Response to Recommendation 1: The Board of Supervisors adopted the Department of Social Services' response that this recommendation requires further analysis. One reason for the change in the number of social workers responsible for an individual child is specialization. The Department of Social Services currently utilizes a system that allows staff to specialize in the various functions of the Child Welfare System thereby enhancing client services and achieving greater compliance with court directives, the Welfare and Institutions Code parameters, and the Federal/State outcome measures promoting the safety, permanency, and well-being of those children served by Child Welfare.

Judge McLafferty
September 2, 2008
Page Three

The specialization of services through Family Preservation and Adoptions has led to better outcomes for children by allowing them to safely remain in their families or by securing for children a family for life. However, the Department of Social Services will continue to seek ways to minimize the number of social workers involved in a case.

Recommendation 2: Santa Barbara County Child Welfare Services needs to continue to expand programs to prepare youth for emancipation.

Response to Recommendation 2: The Board of Supervisors adopted the Department of Social Services' response that this recommendation has been implemented, and will continue to be implemented in the future contingent on additional federal and state funding. The Department of Social Services is actively working on implementing the recommendation to expand these types of programs through increased partnership with other agencies, legislative reform and advocating for additional funding of federal and state programs that pass through to the local government. The Board of Supervisors has also been proactive in advocating for enhanced State funding of the Transitional Housing Placement Program (THPP) and a Transitional Housing Placement-Plus (THP-Plus) program.

Recommendation 3: The Departments of Social Services and Human Resources should immediately investigate and address the problem of high turnover rate of social workers.

Response to Recommendation 3: The Board of Supervisors adopted the Department of Social Services and Human Resources' responses that this recommendation has been implemented and will continue to be implemented in the future as both departments have been proactively collaborating on developing strategies to address the turnover rate of social workers.

Recommendation 4: Santa Barbara County Child Welfare Services should be more responsive to the needs of group homes, foster homes and other providers. There should be regularly scheduled meetings to address these needs.

Response to Recommendation 4: The Board of Supervisors adopted the Department of Social Services' response that this recommendation will be implemented. The Department has devised several strategies to increase communication between Child Welfare Services and its providers, but will continue to develop other communication methods to provide information to group homes, foster homes and other providers.

Sincerely,

Salud Carbajal
Chair
Board of Supervisors

cc: Grand Jury Foreman