



BOARD OF SUPERVISORS  
AGENDA LETTER

Agenda Number:

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

**Department Name:** Social Services  
**Department No.:** 044  
**For Agenda Of:** 6/07/2016  
**Placement:** Departmental  
**Estimated Time:** 30 Minutes  
**Continued Item:** Yes  
**If Yes, date from:** 4/05/2016  
**Vote Required:** N/A

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**TO:** Board of Supervisors

**FROM:** Department Director(s) Mona Miyasato, County Executive Officer (805)568-3400  
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**SUBJECT:** County Executive Office & Department of Social Services Response to the Child Welfare Safety Net Task Force Report

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**County Counsel Concurrence**

As to form: N/A

**Auditor-Controller Concurrence**

As to form: N/A

**Other Concurrence:** N/A

As to form:

**Recommended Actions:**

That the Board of Supervisors:

- a) Receive and file the County Executive Office & Department of Social Services Response to the Child Welfare Safety Net Task Force Report to the Board of Supervisors; or,
- b) Provide other direction to staff as appropriate; and,
- c) Determine that the execution of the Agreement is exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to the CEQA Guidelines Section 15061 (b) (3) finding that the execution of the Agreement is covered by the general rule that CEQA applies only to projects which have the potential for causing a significant effect on the environment, and where it can be seen with certainty that there is no possibility that the activity may have a significant effect on the environment, the activities are not subject to CEQA.

**Summary Text:**

This item is on the agenda in order for the Board to receive and file the County Executive Office and Department of Social Services assessment and responses to the recommendations within the Child Welfare Safety Net Task Force Report previously provided to the Board of Supervisors on April 5, 2016.

**Background:**

On April 14, 2015 the Board of Supervisors approved and authorized the convening of a Child Welfare Safety Net Task Force (Task Force) for the purpose of assessing the overall system of public and community based child welfare services in Santa Barbara County that address the needs of children (and their families) who become, or are at risk of becoming, dependents of the court under Article 6, Section 300 of the Welfare and Institutions Code. Each Supervisor subsequently appointed one member from his or her District with knowledge of child welfare, child development, and family systems issues to serve on the Task Force.

The charter of the Task Force was to conduct a holistic assessment of the strengths, weaknesses and gaps of the Child Welfare System in Santa Barbara County and to produce a report by April 14, 2016 with findings and recommendations for the Board of Supervisors which:

1. Acknowledges what parts of the system are currently working well and why.
2. Identifies and makes recommendations regarding areas of the system that could be improved.
3. Identifies and makes recommendations regarding existing needs not currently addressed by the system and what could be done to fill those gaps.

On April 5, 2016, the Task Force presented its report to the Board of Supervisors with the following recommendations:

1. The Creation of a County Chief Child Advocate Position
2. Specific Responsibilities of the County Chief Child Advocate
3. Additional Recommendations

The work of the Task Force was extremely helpful in bringing new perspectives regarding existing processes and services to the attention of the department and other stakeholders. Further it has started new conversations about partnerships and collaborations as well as new opportunities to enhance current practices and seek innovative solutions to emerging issues.

Following the presentation of the Task Force, the Board of Supervisors requested the CEO and Department of Social Services provide a response to the recommendations of the Task Force. Since that time the County Executive Office and the Department of Social Services have reviewed the recommendations and assessed activities and efforts within the County to achieve the common goal of ensuring the health and safety of children. As noted in the Task Force Report, the primary recommendation is the creation of a County Chief Child Advocate position. This position is envisioned to facilitate collaboration between County agencies, community organizations, faith based organizations, the community, and oversee and implement the development of strategies to address child welfare needs across all systems, among numerous other duties. In addition to the creation of the position twelve additional, yet interrelated recommendations, regarding system enhancements were provided. Summarized, these recommendations include:

1. Enhance training programs for resource families
2. Develop a sustained public relations campaign
3. Create vehicle to share vital case information with partner agencies
4. Facilitate path and communication to promote reconciliation
5. Recruit and retain social workers and review recruitment process
6. Implement technology updates to assist in reporting and record keeping
7. Establish retreat for stakeholders
8. Identify and recruit bilingual and bicultural mental health service providers
9. Develop processes to encourage early assessment for prenatal substance abuse
10. Encourage the development of short term (level 13) mental health placements
11. Continue funding to partner agencies assisting the Child Welfare System
12. Focus on youth sex trafficking and legislative updates to Child Welfare System

The County's efforts both new and ongoing to respond to Task Force's recommendations are discussed in the attached report (Attachment A) and summarized below.

In regards to the Task Force's primary recommendation, creation of the County Chief Child Advocate position, after review by the County Executive Office and the Department of Social Services, it is believed that many of the goals of the position are being achieved by the Department but can be further enhanced through improved communication and coordination of the system partners. A summary of the key responsibilities of the Task Force recommended County Chief Child Advocate position, as well as the County's assessment of how to best address the areas are referenced below:

**Facilitate communication and intradepartmental coordination within the County:** To improve coordination and collaboration among County departments, as well as facilitate collaboration among other partner agencies to enhance Child Welfare, the Interagency Policy Council (IAPC), comprised of all County Health and Human Services Department Heads (Social Services, Behavioral Wellness, Public Health, Probation, First Five, Child Support Services) and lead by the Assistant CEO, will ensure the recommendations of the task force are sentinel issues for coordination and discussion for each monthly meeting. This executive level forum is geared toward facilitating coordination among departments immediately identifying and addressing any barriers to resolving issues. The IAPC has been utilized in the past to ensure robust and coordinated implementation of the Affordable Care Act, Katie A, Poverty Report, prioritization of funding as well as other priorities of the Board. The IACP will coordinate the interdepartmental items that emerge as they pertain to child welfare, provide a forum for discussion and resolution and track progress on issues. The IAPC also plays a critical role in networking among various external system partners and can further facilitate the message coordination of child welfare needs broadly.

**Create greater public awareness of issues pertinent to child welfare and at risk youth including recognition/support for resource families:** A matter also referenced in various areas of the report, as well as an emphasis for the position recommended, is enhanced communication and public information to ensure awareness of issues and needs within the child welfare system. This included the need for active and consistent disbursement of resource information as well as a public relations campaign to create greater Santa Barbara Community awareness around the need to support resource families and the children most at risk. The recently retained County Communications Manager/PIO may support the Department of Social Services in formulating a

communications strategy and public information messages designed to meet the recommendations outlined in the report.

**Strengthened accountability and monitoring of service quality, community involvement, strategic planning and strengthened collaboration/communication among agencies:** In order to address these critical areas it is recommended the Department of Social Services will thoroughly utilize the California Children and Family Services Review (CFSR) process as a vehicle to strategically plan for the future, coordinate activities and monitor outcomes and address issues raised with the Task Forces' report. The purpose of the CFSR is to both strengthen accountability and to monitor and assess the quality of services provided on behalf of youth in the foster care system. As such, the CFSR operates on a philosophy of setting strategic goals, continuous quality improvement, interagency partnerships, community involvement and public reporting of program outcomes, all which will be utilized to aggressively address the recommendations of the Task Force. The principal components of the CFSR Process include: 1) County Self-Assessment (CSA), 2) County System Improvement Plan (SIP), and 3) County System Improvement Plan Progress Reports (SIP Progress Reports). The Department is preparing for its next five year CFSR Process which will commence beginning in July of 2016. It is fortuitous the Task Force Report was completed immediately before embarking on the new CSFR process. As a result, the Task Force Report in combination with robust stakeholder engagement through a series of community convenings will be foundational in the development of the County Self-Assessment and subsequent System Improvement Plan required by the CFSR process. The Department is also fortunate to have a dedicated and enthusiastic stakeholder community comprised of non-profits, philanthropists, consumers, and County partners all of which play an integral role in the process. The findings and recommendations of the Task Force will serve to inform further stakeholder discussions, build upon best practices, and inspire new targeted strategies designed to improve outcomes for our County's children. In addition, the Department of Social Services will continue holding ongoing quarterly stakeholder meetings and intends to submit a presentation annually to the Board of Supervisors inclusive of performance, improvements, challenges, and systemic issues in conjunction with the CFSR process.

**Monitoring the growing issue of child sex trafficking and legislative proposals that impact the Child Welfare System:** As discussed in the attached report, significant efforts are underway within the County to address the issue of sex trafficking. In addition to the Department of Social Services Commercially Sexually Exploited Children (CSEC) Program which focuses on youth under the Jurisdiction of CWS, the Resiliency, Intervention for Sexual Exploitation (RISE) program was implemented in July of 2105 to address the unmet needs of sexually exploited children in the County. The Human Trafficking Task Force, spearheaded by the District Attorney, works with partners and individuals to provide traditional and nontraditional supports to improve the lives of those within the program. In addition the Commercially Exploited Children (CSEC) Court is also a multi-agency collaborative component of the overall program which serves sex exploited youth in the juvenile justice system. Together these programs provide a forum for aggressive multi agency response to the issue of child and youth sex trafficking in the County. Further the issue of sex trafficking and the County's response had been reported on to the full Board of Supervisors. These progress reports will occur annually and Task Force participants will be made aware of these reports.

In response to the recommendation to monitor of legislative proposals, the County will work in concert with our legislative advocates at the state and federal level to ensure that child welfare matters are placed on the County's "watch" list so that the Department of Social Services and the County Executive Office is immediate informed of legislative proposals the can impact the system and all at-risk children. Once informed the County can work with the Legislative Committee of the Board of Supervisors to review legislative proposals and respond accordingly.

In reference to the twelve additional recommendations provided by the Task Force, the County Executive Office and The Department of Social Services has reviewed each item and concur with many of the areas for improvements in order to enhance the overall system of care. It is again believed that while many of the recommendations are currently being achieved by the Department all areas can be further improved. The following listing provides highlights of key activities or strategies anticipated to address the additional recommendation of the Task Force. Further detail regarding each recommendation is provided within Attachment A.

**Key strategies to address recommendations:**

- 1. Enhance training programs for resource families** – The County will continue to work directly with the Quality Parenting Initiative to look at enhancements to training for resource families. Additionally, this recommendation will be referred to the Children's System of Care for further action. This forum includes internal and external stakeholders and service providers which can work collaboratively to ensure that trainings are both trauma informed and responsive to the unique needs of resource families.
- 2. Develop a sustained public relations campaign** – This recommendation will be addressed by the Department of Social Services with the support of the County Communication Manager /PIO to develop a comprehensive communications strategy addressing multiple communications/information related recommendations within the report to effectively communicate the needs of the Child Welfare System.
- 3. Create vehicle to share vital case information with partner agencies** – This recommendation will be considered as a part of the IAPC coordination activities and via the CSFR process.
- 4. Facilitate path and communication to promote reconciliation** – The County will continue to work directly with the Quality Parenting Initiative to look at evidence based strategies as well as new innovations to promote reconciliation. This recommendation will also be considered as a part of the CSFR process.
- 5. Recruit and retain social workers and review recruitment process** – The Department of Social Services is currently working to retain a new recruitment manager to expedite the hiring processes. In addition the Department is continuing to work to reduce caseloads for Social Workers.
- 6. Implement technology updates to assist is reporting and record keeping** – The California Department of Social Services (CDSS) in conjunction with the County is actively working on implementation of the Child Welfare Services-New System (CWS-NS) which is a state of the art suite of applications to aid workers to engage and assist children. Testing of the new system will begin in 2016.

- 7. Establish retreat for stakeholders** – While a formal stakeholder retreat is not envisioned at this time, the Department will continue to hold quarterly stakeholder meetings as well as community convenings in conjunction with the development of the CFSR.
- 8. Identify and recruit bilingual and bicultural mental health service providers** – The Cultural Competency Committee of the Behavioral Wellness System Change process has also identified this issue as a priority item for 2016. An action team to prepare goals and objectives was recently established. These action teams work in conjunction with the Director of Behavioral Wellness and the Assistant CEO to advance the overall goals of System Change. The activities are now reported and tracked bi-monthly to ensure timely completion.
- 9. Develop processes to encourage early assessment for prenatal substance abuse** – The Department of Social Services in collaboration with Behavioral Wellness believe that this is a priority for the system. This topic will be considered by IAPC to determine other mechanisms beyond what is currently in place to enhance early assessments and referrals.
- 10. Encourage the development of short term (level 13) mental health placements** – Additional specialty mental health placements are a focus of continuum of care reform. The Department of Social Services in collaboration with Behavioral Wellness will address this recommendation and engage with local providers to support this process.
- 11. Continue funding to partner agencies assisting the Child Welfare System** – The Department is committed to continuing to maintain funding to key partner agencies in support of the overall Child Welfare System.
- 12. Focus on youth sex trafficking and legislative updates to Child Welfare System** – Please reference response above.

**Fiscal and Facilities Impacts:**

The improvements recommended by staff can be achieved within existing department budgets. As noted, due to the ability to enhance existing processes and systems to address multiple issues identified in the Task Force Report, a Chief Child Advocate position is not recommended at this juncture. However, should the Board of Supervisors wish to consider a position of this nature, it is anticipated that this position would be an Assistant Department Head level and report to the County Executive Office. The full cost (salary and benefits) of the position annually is approximately \$200,000. This does not include ancillary costs.

**Attachments:**

**Attachment A** - County Executive Office & Department of Social Services Response to the Child Welfare Safety Net Task Force Report

**Attachment B** - Child Welfare Safety Net Task Force Report April 5, 2016

**Authored by:**

Amy Krueger, Division Chief, Department of Social Services