

**BOARD OF SUPERVISORS RESPONSE TO
GRAND JURY REPORT NO. 1011:
Our Foster Care Children in Jeopardy**

FINDINGS

1. CFS lost 119 positions from January 2008 to January 2009. Of those, 65 social workers were eliminated from the foster care program.

Response: Respondent agrees with finding.

2. Contra Costa County was serving approximately 1,100 foster children as of December 31, 2009.

Response: Respondent agrees with finding

3. CFS foster care case file information is both computerized and on paper. Information is not consistent between the two types of files and neither contains complete information.

Response: Respondent partially disagrees with finding. Contra Costa County is required to utilize a Statewide Child Welfare information system. The information in this system includes all documents generated by the social worker to allow for the documentation of services to families. If one is not familiar with that application, or has not been trained on the use of that system, it is difficult to understand. Paper files are necessary for record keeping of all services and other legal documents that are not generated by the social worker. The current state system was not designed to allow non child welfare staff the ability to enter their reports into the system. Therefore paper and electronic files are intended to be combined to make a complete file.

4. Access to computerized case files is restricted to the social workers.

Response: Respondent agrees with finding. State and federal law requires that child welfare information is confidential and may only be accessed if the person is a party to the legal action. To maintain confidentiality only social workers and other authorized personnel have access to these confidential files based on their role with the family.

5. The court case files were well-organized and easy to follow, in contrast, the CFS files were cumbersome and incomplete.

Response: Respondent partially disagrees with finding. The respondent is not able to comment on court files. CFS records require multiple volumes and are on paper and within an electronic database. Due to the nature of the family issues and the number

of members in a family the volumes can make it difficult for someone who was not trained or someone who does not have daily contact with the files to track. The respondent is not aware of any incomplete files.

6. Not all CFS records contain documentation of school attendance.
 - There is no school attendance policy for children under the age of sixteen.
 - Children 16 years and older must attend school for foster parent payments to continue.
 - Foster parents are responsible for the child's attendance.
 - Social workers may or may not be notified of truancy.

Response: Respondent partially disagrees with finding. The Health and Educational Passport is an electronic document within the statewide data base that was designed to capture the information regarding where a child attends school. The passport is not intended to capture attendance but intended to document the progress that a child has attained educationally. All information regarding the child's progress in school is captured in court reports which are completed every six months for all school aged children. Additionally, the department has a contract with the Office of Education to provide additional tutoring services to youth who are not able to utilize the services through their school. The department also works with the Office of Education to employ Educational Liaisons who are co-located with Child Welfare Social Workers. The liaisons work with the social worker, the youth, the caregiver and the school to ensure the youth's educational needs are met. They also participate in Individualized Educational Plans, disability accommodation meetings and all other processes necessary to ensure the success of the youth.

7. Frequent changes in home and school placements negatively affect a foster child's academic performance and future success in life.

Response: Respondent agrees with finding.

8. Medical assessments, social assessments, and immunizations are completed within 30 days of the foster child's removal from the home. Social workers do not automatically receive these records.

Response: Respondent agrees with finding. Social workers do not automatically receive the reports on the child's health but they are able to find out the information from the child's caregiver and the public health nurse who does automatically receive the reports. The public health nurses are co-located with the social workers and help CFS to ensure children are receiving appropriate medical services.

9. Due to lack of record sharing, immunizations are sometimes done repeatedly in error.

Response: Respondent disagrees with finding. The Respondent is not aware of any children who have had immunizations repeated. Also respondent is not aware of a

lack of record sharing when a provider has been identified as having records for a child being served by Children and Family Services Bureau.

10. Mental health records require court or parental authorization for release to CFS.

Response: Respondent agrees with finding. Mental Health records are protected by federal and state regulations. As is required by these laws, CFS is required to have a court order or parental authorization for children's records or parent records. This process ensures that privacy laws are upheld and does not delay CFS in addressing the needs of the children.

11. Training of mental health service providers in the treatment of childhood trauma is insufficient.

Response: Respondent is unable to agree or disagree with finding as the respondent does not train mental health providers.

12. The staff of Home Finders has been reduced from 8 to 3 workers, leaving each with a caseload of approximately 300 homes, to assess for new and continuing foster care placement.

Response: Respondent partially disagrees with finding. The Home finding unit has been reduced to the number of staff authorized by the funding for the program. Based on the allocation Contra Costa County is funded for 2.9 Full Time Equivalent (FTEs) staff including a supervisor. In April 2010 Contra Costa County had 439 licensed foster homes with 164 pending applications. The three licensing staff are each managing 146 existing licensed homes and working with 55 families who are working on completing their licensing tasks for a total of 201 cases per worker on average.

13. CFS works toward reunification of foster children with their immediate families as a first priority. If not possible, placement for foster children is with a relative or a licensed foster care home.

Response: Respondent agrees with finding.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. CFS shall establish procedures among providers for the exchange of essential information about the children and families they serve.

Response: This recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted. All documents and essential information are shared in accordance with County, State and Federal statutes.

2. CFS shall ensure that all service providers including CHDP staff, mental health practitioners, social workers and school personnel have access to all information about the child.

Response: This recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted. All documents and essential information is already shared in accordance with County, State and Federal statutes.

3. After all efforts to reunify the child with his or her parents have failed; the next action of CFS shall be to locate extended family members utilizing the nationwide Family Finding Network.

Response: This recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted. This recommendation is already a practice in accordance with State and Federal regulations that guide the practice regarding the process of reunification. The department does not wait until the end of reunification efforts have failed to locate other alternate permanent plans for children. The department provides concurrent planning efforts for all children. Additionally, Employment and Human Services has an existing contract with a vendor which provides nationwide search capability.

4. CPS shall make tracking of school attendance of foster children a top priority.

Response: This recommendation will not be implemented. Supporting the academic success of children in foster care is already a priority for the department and attendance is closely monitored by the foster child's caregivers. The Department, the child's caregivers, the Office of Education and Foster Youth Service all work closely together to assist in helping youth achieve their academic success. Additionally, Employment and Human Services contracts with the Office of Education for Educational Liaisons who work with the social workers and caregivers in meeting the needs of the children and youth. The department has maintained this service for over 10 years in an effort to improve the educational success of the children in foster care. The Educational Liaisons are co-located with Social Workers and assist in ensuring the timely collection and sharing of student information. They assist in development of special educational plans and if needed participate in individual meetings to ensure the youth are afforded all academic services available.

5. The Board of Supervisors shall make the needs of foster children a top priority when allocating and administering public resources.

Response: This recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted. The needs of children are already a top priority for the Board of Supervisors. When allocating and administering public resources, many necessary and important services compete for very limited resources. The Board takes into consideration all County services when allocating and administering public resources.

6. The Board of Supervisors shall ensure that providers of mental health services to foster children shall have training in current trauma-focused therapy.

Response: The recommendation will not be adopted because it is not reasonable. The Board of Supervisors utilizes individuals licensed by the State of California to provide these services and has no authority over their training. In addition, the Board of Supervisors does not have the professional expertise to designate a therapeutic modality of treatment for children in foster care.