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LOS ANGELES COUNTY COMMISSION FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

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October 7, 2005

The Honorable Board of Supervisors
County of Los Angeles
383 Kenneth Hahn Hall of Administration
500 West Temple Street
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Dear Supervisors:

COUNTYWIDE ENHANCED SPECIALIZED FOSTER CARE MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

The Commission for Children and Families (Commission) is aware that your Board will be considering a joint recommendation from the Department of Mental Health (DMH) and the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) to approve the proposal for the Countywide Enhanced Specialized Foster Care Mental Health Services Plan (Plan). Over the years, the Commission has been disturbed by the lack of priority given to foster youth in the mental health service delivery system. Funding for such services has been insufficient to meet the needs of all youth under the county's supervision and there has not been an efficient system in place that meets their need for ongoing assessment, appropriate and consistent treatment, and is outcome driven. While we are encouraged by the collaborative efforts of DMH and DCFS to develop an overall plan to ensure that foster youth have ready access to mental health treatment services, the Commission has concerns we would like for you to consider when determining whether to accept the Plan as recommended.

Urgency and Priority in Implementation

As the county prepares itself for the substantial task of implementing the Mental Health Services Act (MHSA), we worry that the urgency, priority and attention needed to implement the joint recommended Plan in a thorough and timely manner will be seriously hindered. This Plan will require full-time oversight.

Timetable

It is our recommendation that the Plan include an implementation timetable that considers the responsibilities of each agency and the resources, both human and financial, necessary to put the Plan in practice. We need to understand how the departments will work together to create a user friendly system that includes the families and the caregivers as well as the children. How does it function in combination with the DCFS initiatives and the Court requirements?

Integrated Plan

Please consider how this Plan will be integrated in the recommendations that will be developed from the MHSA planning process. The Commission believes in an integrated system of care for children and families instead of a siloed delivery system that provides fragmented services to children and families and more often than not does not meet the needs of the whole child and whole family. It is critical that we leverage and integrate MHSA and EPSDT funds so that the County will provide youth and families under its care with a comprehensive service delivery system. We are supportive of utilizing evidenced based models, but understand that in order to achieve intended outcomes you must adhere to practice fidelity.

Probation Youth

The Commission has great concern for the mental health of children in the probation system. Many youth in the probation system were at some point previously in the dependency system. Frequently it is troubled behavior that brings them under the supervision of the probation system. Under AB 129 DCFS will have oversight of these children. It is, therefore, critical that that this population is included in the Plan. At a minimum we recommend including the population of probation youth that reside in DCFS funded group homes into the Plan.

Training for All Stakeholders

As the key elements of this joint Plan requires county agency partnership and public-private partnership, it is imperative that training for both internal and external stakeholders is carefully planned for and considered a key area of focus in the implementation plan. Evidenced-based practice is only successful when practitioners – both public and private – are properly trained in the new intervention models they are asked to implement. However, budgeting for ongoing training needs is not always integrated into operational plans at the outset. We recommend consideration be given to the appropriate level of training resources that will be necessary to achieve improved results for children.

Thank you in advance for your consideration of our concerns. We feel strongly that all children in the county have ready access to needed mental health treatment services to ensure their stability and well being.

The Honorable Board of Supervisors

October 7, 2005

Page 3 of 3

Respectfully Submitted,

Helen Kleinberg
Chair

C: Child Deputies
Health Deputies
Justice Deputies
Dr. David Sanders, Director, DCFS
Dr. Charles Sophy, Medical Director, DCFS
Dr. Marvin Southard, Director, DMH

HAK/dewb