

**Little Hoover Commission Hearing on Child Welfare Services**  
**Comments by Sylvia Pizzini**  
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**November 21, 2002**

The August 1999 Report of the Little Hoover Commission, *Now in Our Hands: Caring for California's Abused and Neglected Children*, contains 14 far reaching recommendations that reflect sound public policy and lay the groundwork for reform of the Child Welfare Services system. The Department of Social Services has used this report as one of our authoritative sources in the development of program goals for the short term as well as in the child welfare redesign being formulated by the Child Welfare Services Stakeholders Group.

## **The Current Child Welfare Services Program**

### **Vision of the Children and Family Services Division within the California Department of Social Services:**

The Children and Family Services Division provides leadership and oversight of county and community agencies in the implementation of Child Welfare Services programs through regulations, training, technical assistance, incentives and program evaluations.

### **The Mission is to:**

- Lead the development, implementation and evaluation of statewide regulations and standards for Child Welfare Services so that public policies are effectively transformed into action by:
  - Continually updating regulations and related material to reflect new public policies and best practice methodologies.
  - Developing and supporting training so that social workers and administrators have knowledge and understanding of their roles and responsibilities.
  - Providing technical assistance to promote a continuum of services designed to ensure children's well-being, safety and permanence.
  - Creating a user-friendly system, clear procedures and useful tools.
  - Encouraging and supporting community-based services, including prevention, early intervention and treatment programs.
  - Evaluating program results based on the outcomes of our services for children and families.
  
- Communicate to ourselves and others the role of the Division in setting, implementing and evaluating Child Welfare Services outcomes.
  
- Promote smooth working relationships with all stakeholders of the Child Welfare Services system.

## **Business Plan for 2003**

The Children and Family Services Division's business plan is under development for 2003. Some highlights of this plan are described below.

### **Planning and Policy Development**

- ❑ Leadership of the Child Welfare Services Stakeholder Group to finalize recommendations for the redesign of Child Welfare Services – June 30, 2003.
- ❑ Prepare for and implement a Program Improvement Plan pursuant to the results of the federal Children and Family Services Review – three months after receipt of the findings, approximately March 2003.

### **Program Development**

- ❑ Improve availability of alcohol and drug services to recipients of Child Welfare Services, pursuant to Memorandum of Understanding with the Department of Alcohol and Drug Programs and in collaboration with Children and Family Futures. – ongoing.
- ❑ Facilitate development and implementation of County protocols between law enforcement and Child Welfare Services to promote coordinated responses to domestic violence situations, pursuant to SB 1745 (Chapter 187, Statutes of 2002) – ongoing.
- ❑ Collaborate with CalWORKs and The Stuart Foundation to integrate services to recipients of both Temporary Assistance to Needy Families and Child Welfare Services – ongoing.
- ❑ Work with the Department of Mental Health to collaborate on pending Day Treatment Regulations to address meeting the mental health service needs of foster youth – ongoing.

### **Program Operations and Support**

- ❑ Implement the CWS/CMS strategic plan elements in collaboration with the CWS/CMS Oversight Committee – ongoing.
- ❑ Implement the Family-to-Family initiative in 12 Counties to strengthen community-based, family involved foster care – ongoing.
- ❑ Continue training for social workers regarding the purposes of the Adoption and Safe Families Act and the relative approval process – through June 30, 2003.
- ❑ Continue to build the outreach capacity of the Ombudsman program -- ongoing.

- Implement audit standards required by the United States Department of Health and Human Services for Group Homes and Foster Family Agencies April 1, 2003 and ongoing.

### **Workforce preparation**

- Continue collaboration with the California Social Work Education Center and the Social Work Training Academies to provide education and training to line Social Workers and other staff – ongoing.

### **Program Oversight and Evaluation**

- Prepare for and facilitate the Social Security Act Title 1V-E review by the federal government – June 2003.
- Monitor and work with Counties on corrective action plans when necessary to ensure Counties' compliance with Social Security Act Title IV – B and Division 31 Regulations as implemented by Child Welfare Services and Probation agencies – ongoing.
- Support Health and Human Services Agency in the implementation of AB 636 to change to an outcome-based accountability system – plan completed June 30, 2003; implementation January 1, 2004.

## **Response to specific areas of concern to the Commission**

The Commission requested that the Department provide testimony and participate in the hearing to address the following concerns;

- 1. How will the Child Welfare Redesign address Governance roles of the State and local agencies?** The Child Welfare Services Stakeholders Group is examining this question in its third year of work. The Department's current approach is to involve the Counties and other appropriate stakeholders in making decisions regarding how programs should be implemented and evaluated. By creating ownership of the strategies and agreement on how to invest scarce resources to carry them out, Counties are invested in achieving successful outcomes of common goals. At the same time, the State takes its oversight role very seriously, and requires that the collaborative decision-making process be grounded in federal and state policy requirements. The compliance review process now in use to hold Counties accountable will be replaced by an outcome-based review pursuant to recent legislation in January 2004.
- 2. What is being done to keep children from being in an inordinate number of placements?** There are several efforts underway that address this problem, including a greater emphasis on placement with relatives who can provide safe, nurturing care; the Family-to-Family initiative that involves birth families in placement decisions and keeps children in their own neighborhoods and schools; concurrent planning which ensures that children have an alternative

permanency plan if and when the Court determines that reunification with birth parents should not occur; foster parent and social worker training; continued outreach by the Ombudsman for Foster Care to facilitate resolution of issues that might lead to a placement move; adoption for older youth initiative; extensive input by foster youth and former foster youth into policy decisions regarding what works and what does not work.

**3. Has the State worked to ensure that all children in foster care have mentors through the State's mentorship initiative?** The Foster Youth Mentoring Program is a state and local collaboration among the Chancellor's Office of the California Community Colleges, the California Department of Social Services, the California Department of Alcohol and Drug Programs and the California Youth Connection. AmeriCorps members provide foster youth one-on-one mentoring for approximately 10 hours per week for at least 9-12 months. Youth-specific goals are developed based on interests and needs. Through a service-learning approach, mentors receive extensive training prior to commencing the mentoring relationship and are supported throughout their service through on-going training and weekly reflection meetings. Emphasis is placed on recruiting former foster youth as mentors. During the 2001-2002 fiscal year, this program served approximately 370 foster youth. In addition, through the Independent Living Program, an additional 3,913 foster youth received mentoring.

**4. Has the Department taken steps to help foster youth obtain employment with the State?** Through the Independent Living Program foster youth obtain vocational training and employment. During the last fiscal year, 1,100 foster youth received vocational or on-the-job training; 1,554 foster youth worked full-time; and 3,229 foster youth worked part-time.

Recently, the California Department of Social Services has brought a wide range of stakeholders together including representatives from the Workforce Investment Act, Employment Development Department, Department of Education, Casey Family Programs, to develop a process for all foster youth to be enrolled in One-Stop Career Centers.

**5. Has the State taken steps to ensure that all foster youth receive a free or low cost education through adult education and training programs or the public colleges and universities?** Legislation enacted last year expanded eligibility for Cal Grants to former foster youth so that they could receive funds to cover living expenses, tuition and books when pursuing higher education. In many counties youth receive tutoring through the Foster Youth Services program. Additionally, through collaboration among the Chancellor's Office of the California Community Colleges, the Community College Foundation and the Department, classes are offered at 50 community colleges throughout the state to assist young people as they make the transition to higher education. One of the key topics covered is how to obtain financial aid services.

During the 2000-2001 fiscal year 3,616 youth completed high school/GED; 1,619 were enrolled in a community college; and 621 youth were enrolled in a four-year university.

- 6. Has the State explored opportunities to offer both education and housing through the public colleges and universities?** Recently the California Department of Social Services conducted a survey of the housing needs of emancipated foster Youth. Survey results indicate that only 8 youth are currently living in college dormitories while attending college and that Counties have identified another 153 additional dormitory beds that will be set-aside for this population. Department staff will collaborate with Counties, universities, colleges and housing organizations to step up services in this area. Under the provisions of AB 1119 (Chapter 639, Statutes of 2002) housing for emancipated foster youth will be developed, thus furthering our ability to achieve this goal.
- 7. How should the Commission define success for the foster care system and the role it should play to ensure progress?** The Department invites the Commission to embrace the vision, mission, values and principles of the Child Welfare Stakeholders Group as the basis for defining success for all families and children served by the Child Welfare Services program. Key indicators of success include reduction in the number of abused and neglected children; and increase in the number of successful reunification of foster children with their birth parents; an increase in the number of children who are cared for by relatives when they cannot be with their birth parents; and an increase in the number of guardianships and adoptions of youth who cannot be reunified with their birth parents. The ultimate goal would be for all children to have a safe, permanent home with nurturing caregivers well before they reach the age of 18 so that they can transition to adulthood with the love and support of family.

Again, the Department wishes to thank the Commission for its commitment to the children and families of California and for its role in helping us achieve common goals for the safety, permanence and well-being of every child.