



**CONTRA COSTA COUNTY CIVIL GRAND JURY REPORT NO. 1612
"Foster Care Under AB 403"**

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS' RESPONSE

FINDINGS – *California Penal Code Section 933.5(a) requires a response to the designated findings of the Grand Jury.*

F1. The attrition rate of families in the county who are willing to foster children is high.

Response: Respondent agrees with this finding.

F2. Many potential foster parents have been eliminated from the list of currently available foster parents, after it was found that they were only interested in adopting and were not willing to take in older foster youth.

Response: Respondent agrees with this finding. When these families make their wishes known to CFS staff, they update the list accordingly.

F3. The County uses Foster Family Agencies (FFA) after first trying to locate suitable potential homes in the system.

Response: Respondent agrees with this finding.

F4. The foster caregivers identified through FFA are sometimes more experienced, and receive more support and training from the FFA.

Response: Respondent agrees with this finding.

F5. FFA social workers have lighter caseloads than County social workers.

Response: Respondent agrees with this finding.

F6. There is a shortage of available, qualified foster homes in the County, as evidenced by the 384 youth that are currently located in out-of-county foster homes.

Response: Respondent agrees in part with this finding. There is a shortage of foster homes, however, it is important to note many of these youth are placed with relatives out of county.

F7. Children and Family Services (CFS) selects foster parents recruited by the County instead of by FFA because they cost approximately 40 percent less and the County

foster parents are better known to the CFS Placement team as they were selected, trained and licensed by the County.

Response: Respondent agrees in part with this finding. Foster parents known to CFS and with whom there is a documented history are often preferable placements, but placement decisions are based on the best possible alternative for the child.

F8. The County has not performed a "gap" analysis to specifically identify the type of foster homes most needed.

Response: Respondent agrees with this finding. There is no available funding for this activity.

F9. There is a shortage of foster parents willing and able to take in teenagers.

Response: Respondent agrees with this finding.

F10. Foster family recruitment efforts have not kept up with the need for foster families.

Response: Respondent agrees with this finding.

F11. The CFS recruiting position, which is the position that is responsible for foster parent recruitment, has not been filled and is currently staffed by one person on a half-time basis.

Response: Respondent disagrees with this finding. The position is filled with a full time recruiter.

F12. CFS is not accumulating information to help measure outcomes of County foster youth and determine which providers are the most effective (where applicable).

Response: Respondent agrees with this finding. There is no available funding for this activity.

F13. Mental health professionals do not participate in the new CFS Continuous Quality Improvement process.

Response: Respondent agrees in part with this finding. While the Continuous Quality Improvement process is focused in CFS, Mental Health staff meet regularly with CFS and Probation to review cases, and under AB 403 additional communication will occur.

F14. The County Mental Health Department does limited screenings/assessments of new foster youth.

Response: Respondent disagrees in part with this finding. An initial screening is conducted on all children, but only if they exhibit indications of a mental disorder are they fully assessed by a licensed clinician upon entry in to the system.

F15. CFS placement staff often does not have a complete mental health diagnosis, suggested treatment plan or prognosis prior to placing a new foster youth with foster

parents.

Response: Respondent disagrees with this finding. As described above, an initial screening is conducted for all children placed and only those exhibiting indications of a mental disorder are referred for a full assessment by a licensed clinician. Due to the need to place children as soon as possible, a full assessment and treatment plan for those who have been referred for evaluation may not be completed prior to placement.

F16. Ongoing mental health therapy for foster youth is frequently not as effective as it could be because it is difficult to arrange and often interrupted due to the movement of youth between foster homes.

Response: Respondent agrees with this finding. Every effort is made by County staff to ensure continuity of care for children in the system, however, the availability and location of resources are a constant challenge.

F17. Out-of-county placement strains the resources of CFS both monetarily and in terms of staff time as CFS staff have to travel to wherever the foster youth is located.

Response: Respondent agrees with this finding.

F18. CFS is experiencing significant challenges in coordinating with all the necessary agencies involved to meet the requirements of AB 403.

Response: Respondent disagrees with the finding. Coordination has improved with the creation of an Executive Leadership Team comprised of the Directors of Employment and Human Services (EHSD), Behavioral Health, Probation and the Chief Assistant County Administrator. In addition, a Steering Committee, facilitated by a consultant, has direct responsibility for guiding the implementation activities for CCR. This Committee is comprised of the CFS Director, the Chief of Children's Mental Health, and a Probation Manager.

F19. The outcomes of faith-based foster children are often better than for children fostered in secular homes, as their stay with such families is longer than the average and the youth gain an increased sense of belonging to a community.

Response: Respondent disagrees with this finding. CFS has no data to support such a finding, nor does it reflect actual experience in regard to lengths of stay in foster care.

F20. Current Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) or job classifications do not permit sufficient flexibility to allow for mental health professionals to respond after hours to situations that arise in the treatment of foster youth.

Response: Respondent disagrees with this finding. The MOUs provide compensation for employees who handle after hours situations, and a contract with SENECA exists for additional resources 24 hours a day/7 days a week.

F21. Based on the current costs of Group Home care, millions of dollars of State support money will be saved when foster youth transition to individual foster families.

Response: Respondent agrees in part with this finding. While the cost of group home care is higher than the projected cost of therapeutic foster family placements, the intent of the Legislature is unknown in regard to the full and final implementation of AB 403. Any State savings and costs associated with Continuum of Care Reform (CCR) are under their control.

F22. High level executives at FFA frequently recruit foster parents, whereas lower level line personnel usually perform this function at the County.

Response: Respondent agrees in part with this finding. It is true that County Social Workers carry out foster parent recruiting duties. However, it is unknown to CFS how the FFA's conduct their recruiting of foster parents.

RECOMMENDATIONS - California Penal Code Section 933.05(b) requires a response to the designated recommendations of the Grand Jury.

R1. The Board of Supervisors should consider creating a special task force with staff from CFS, Mental Health, County Administration, Group Home facilities, and Foster Parents Association to assess the potential safety impact on the community to place foster youth currently in group homes into less qualified foster parent homes.

Response: This recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted. This is being accomplished through our CCR Executive Leadership Team and the CCR Steering Committee. There is no need for an additional task force. Respondent disagrees that foster homes trained for this purpose will be less qualified.

R2. The Board of Supervisors should consider directing this Task Force (R1) to track progress of the recruiting and training of kinship care and new foster families, and network with surrounding counties as to best practices in recruiting and supporting resource families.

Response: This recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted. This is being accomplished through the CCR Steering Committee. There is no need for an additional task force to perform this activity.

R3. The Board of Supervisors should consider directing the Task Force (R1) to explore the feasibility of creating a Mental Health Unit within CFS that would be responsible for the initial assessment and providing and/or supervising ongoing mental health care for foster youth.

Response: This recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted. The existing CCR Executive Leadership Team is assessing the provision of mental health services for foster care youth.

R4. The Board of Supervisors should consider directing CFS to carefully monitor the costs of supporting a foster family and lobby the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) for more financial support for wraparound services to these families based on the documented actual costs.

Response: This recommendation will be implemented as part of the ongoing budget review and the County's legislative advocacy program.

R5. The Board of Supervisors should consider making it a priority to hire at least two full time foster family recruiters, who are classified to be able to work flexible hours, and are expected to be involved with higher level staff in recruiting presentations to recruit new Foster parents, at such time as funds to do so become available.

Response: This recommendation will be implemented to the extent that Federal and State funding is available.

R6. The Board of Supervisors should consider directing CFS to organize more recruitment presentations to prospective foster families, including scheduling some of these presentations on weekday evenings and weekends.

Response: This recommendation is being implemented. CFS is working with the EHSD Media/Community Relations manager to develop a marketing and outreach campaign to attract foster families.

R7. CFS should reach out to FFA to increase foster parent recruitment efforts and consider paying a fee to FFA for each foster family recruited that resides in the County.

Response: This recommendation will not be implemented because it is not reasonable. It is important to note that FFA and the county are competing for the same population.

R8. The Board of Supervisors should consider directing CFS to create specific transition plans for County youth currently in Group Homes, including plans to conduct in depth mental health screenings of those transitioning youth to certify that they are safe to move from the relative safety of the Group Home environment into care of qualified foster parents, and plans for frequent follow up visits by CFS to the new foster parents to ensure the move is successful.

Response: This recommendation will be implemented as it is mandated by AB 403 and is overseen by the CCR Steering Committee.

R9. The Board of Supervisors should consider directing CFS to review all current out-of-county placements to determine if and when any can be safely brought back to the County.

Response: This recommendation is being implemented as required under CCR. Many of these youth are placed out of county with relatives, consistent with federal and state policies to give priority to appropriate relative placements. It is part of CCR to reduce out of county placements

in facilities other than relative placements, and AB 403 requires an assessment of each such group home placement.

R10. The Board of Supervisors should consider directing CFS to create a more defined database of all available foster parents, including those identified through FFA, to identify available foster parents' particular skills, backgrounds and other pertinent attributes, such as whether they reside in-county and out-of-county, and to enable the Placement Unit to more quickly identify the best match for youth in the system.

Response: This recommendation will be implemented to the extent that Federal and State funding is available.

R11. When a foster youth may have mental health issues, the Board of Supervisors should consider requiring CFS to include a mental health professional in the Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) process, and also requiring that the process is coordinated with CQI processes used by FFAs, so that all CQI methods track and trend essentially the same issues.

Response: This recommendation requires further analysis of the program impacts and funding availability which will be addressed by the CCR Executive Leadership Team.

R12. The Board of Supervisors should consider directing CFS to track outcomes of foster youth in the county and then trend these outcomes to guide future policy decisions.

Response: This recommendation requires further analysis regarding the availability of Federal and State funding to support an outcomes database.

R13. The Board of Supervisors should consider negotiating amendments to the applicable MOU to make certain job descriptions/classifications for mental health professions to make working hours more flexible so these mental health care professionals can respond to after-hours situations that arise in the treatment of foster youth.

Response: This recommendation requires further analysis of the program impacts and funding availability which will be addressed by the CCR Executive Leadership Team.