

Meeting Summary for California Child Welfare Council (CWC) Meeting

March 5, 2025

CWC Meeting Summary

The meeting was called to order on March 5, 2025, by Co-chair Kim Johnson, Secretary of the California Health and Human Services Agency and Co-chair Laurie Earl, Presiding Justice of Third District Court of Appeal. Co-chair Secretary Johnson discussed the ongoing support for the 438 impacted child and families following the devastating fires in Los Angeles County. She expressed gratitude for the humanitarian response and the continued work of behavioral health supports in the area. Co-Chair Secretary Johnson also acknowledged the transition at the federal level and committed to the values and progress of California while expressing a willingness to work with the new administration on achieving commonalities. The meeting involved a roll call for attendance, with new members joining the council. The CWC council further discussed the Stepping Home Model Presentation, which the Youth Justice Committee requested to be adopted as the standard of care for transitioning youth from secure facilities to less restrictive programs. The model aims to address restorative justice principles, credible messengers, trauma-informed care, and positive youth development. The council members expressed support for the model and requested ongoing data on its effectiveness. Concerns were raised about youth with developmental disabilities, the victim voice in the process, and the need for additional resources for smaller counties.

New MRAC Tri-Chairs Named

The CWC council discusses the appointment of three tri-chairs for the MRAC. Janay Eustace representing the CWC, Juan Solis representing Lived Expertise, and Alicia Garoupa representing Child and Family Serving System, are named as the new tri-chairs. The MRAC will work on implementing recommendations previously made from the Mandated Reporting to Community Supporting Task Force. The MRAC planning team anticipates MRAC members to be identified by the end of the month and hold their first meeting in April. Assemblymember Corey A. Jackson has introduced legislation ([AB 601](#)) related to this work. The Council expresses appreciation for the continued efforts and leadership in this area.

CASA's Impact on Foster Youth

Sharon Lawrence, CEO of California CASA, introduced the Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) program and its impact across California. Lisa Addy Peat, a CASA volunteer, shared her experience of being matched with and mentoring Gina Pekka, a former foster youth. Gina described how Lisa's support and advocacy helped her overcome challenges, pursue culinary school, and open two successful restaurants. Judge Craig Arthur emphasized the importance of CASA volunteers in providing consistent support and valuable insights to the court about foster youth.

CASA's Impact on Foster Care

Ms. Lawrence discussed the importance of California CASA in supporting children in foster care and juvenile justice systems. She highlighted the organization's mission to provide a voice and services to these children and its impact on education, life skills, and well-being. Sharon also mentioned the 'Just Be You' recruitment campaign, which aims to diversify the volunteer base. Questions from the audience focused on data regarding race, ethnicity, and gender, as well as the organization's support for family reunification. For next steps, California CASA will provide 1)

the council with data on college graduates rates and employment rates for youth served by the CASA programs; 2) information on how they calculated \$1.5 billion in potential savings; 3) share the full evaluation report with the Council, including demographic breakdowns if available; 5) provide Amy Price with a list of counties that have opted into the juvenile justice CASA program; 6) conduct a webinar training for CASA volunteers on the new foster care rate and self-determination allocation.

Committee and Taskforce Updates

Prevention and Early Intervention Committee: Council Member Icenhower provided recognition to the previous PEI Co-chair David Swanson-Hollinger and congratulated him on his new position as the Chief Deputy Director at CDSS. Council Member Dana Blackwell will now be a Co-chair of the PEI Committee.

Permanency Committee: Council Members Friend and Justice Edwards reported the committee will be discussing mentors and tutors and support people for children in and out of the child welfare system. The committee thanked Council members Lawrence, Council Member Arthur and their guests for their presentation.

Data Linkage and Information Sharing Committee: Council Member Webster encouraged CASA to look at the broader picture of the population, not just those that are justice involved. He also noted they will discuss the developments of the CARES system and how they will operationalize the CARES system.

Youth Justice Committee: Council Member Lucero introduced Kendra Jackson, a CDSS specialist over the Juvenile Justice and Education unit in the Foster Care Ombudsman Office. Ms. Jackson provided information about a Breaking Barriers movie screening and a panel discussion that will take place on April 2025.

Behavioral Health Committee: Council Member Stoner-Mertz stated the committee is going to dive deeper into the recommendations that were approved at the previous CWC meeting in December 2024.

CSEC Action Team: Council Member Heimov noted that they will discuss peer to peer recruitment with a panel discussion of those with lived experience. The panel will address recognizing the signs of peer-to peer recruitment, harm reduction practices and education opportunities for youth that includes how biases impact responses to youth and reframing approaches to supporting both youth who are recruiting and those vulnerable to recruitment. Lastly, there will be a legislative update highlighting new bills that have been introduced related to commercial sexual exploitation and learning more about the two bills that were passed last year.

Empowerment Committee: Council Member Wilkes stated the committee will discuss foster youth disaster recovery. He also noted that the CWC should start discussing psychotropic medication for youth in foster care and how the youth are impacted by those medications.

Final Announcements and Closing Remarks

Co-Chair Justice Earl thanked everyone for their participation and adjourned the meeting.