

CALIFORNIA CHILD WELFARE COUNCIL
Discussion Highlights
February 28, 2018

I. Call to Order and Introductions

Secretary Dooley called the meeting to order and welcomed Council Members and visitors. She acknowledged the California Judicial Council for their hospitality and willingness to host the Council for the meeting in San Francisco. Secretary Dooley then asked Council Members to introduce themselves.

II. Approval of the December 4, 2017 Discussion Highlights (Action Item)

Justice Raye asked for comments or suggested revisions to the December 4, 2017 Child Welfare Council Discussion Highlights. There being none, they were approved on a consensus vote.

III. Progress Report on Priority Access to Services Pilot (Information Item)

Secretary Dooley introduced the topic by noting that this was an example of the Council exploring an idea on a small scale to determine if it is successful and can be scaled. She introduced Dana Blackwell and Frank Mecca to present on lessons learned from the Ventura County pilot.

By way of background, at the January 2016 meeting of the Child Welfare Council's PASS Behavioral Health Workgroup a draft Behavioral Health Services Access Protocol was approved. The purpose of this tool was to guide counties to "facilitate priority access, coordination, and quality of care to appropriate behavioral health services and supports for parents in reunification." For clarity, "behavioral health services" refers to mental health services and substance use disorder services. The target population is all parents entering the child welfare system with an open reunification plan. The PASS Behavioral Health Workgroup confirmed readiness for the next step, which would be to beta test the protocol in one county to determine if the assumptions and guidelines were actionable, effective and reasonable.

Ventura County was considered and confirmed as the beta test site by the PASS co-chairs and PASS Behavioral Health Workgroup. Ventura County was selected based on their history of local innovation and collaboration across child and family systems of care, having a strong commitment by the leadership of County Departments of Child and Family Services (CFS) and Ventura County Behavioral Health (VCBH) to improving services and quality of care to families served, as well as willingness by the leadership of Gold Coast Health Plan and Beacon Health Services (the Behavioral Health Managed Care Organization in Ventura) to collaborate.

Ms. Blackwell and Mr. Mecca outlined a number of the lessons learned and challenges with the Ventura County pilot. They noted that leadership, vision, and commitment matter. In order to replicate this model in other counties, a number of factors need to be consider. This includes: plan for staffing and structural support; a communication and monitoring strategy; development of screening and referral forms; and necessary releases of information to comply with federal and state rules and regulations. Finally, Ms. Blackwell and Mr. Mecca note that if this was to be implemented in other counties and scaled, there needs to be consideration as to how to structure and what requirements may be placed by the state in order to ensure that this is a priority.

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IV. Issue Brief on Child Welfare Workforce (Information Item)

Justice Raye introduced Laurie Kappe from the California Child Welfare Co-Investment Partnership to provide an overview of its recent publication, *“Balancing Head and Heart: California’s Child Welfare Workforce”*. The goal of this document is to examine the valuable and complex work performed by California’s child welfare workforce and to highlight both the challenges and opportunity to strengthen and support the field. The complete publication can be found online, [here](#).

V. Progress Report on Pilot Project Serving Youth with Complex Needs (Information Item)

Secretary Dooley introduced Ken Berrick, Emily Higgs, and Alan Vietze to discuss efforts being coordinated by Seneca Family of Agencies regarding high-needs youth. In response to the intensive and unique needs of students identified by K-12 educators working in high poverty communities of Northern California, Seneca Family of Agencies has developed the Unconditional Education (UE) model, which uses an innovative, multi-tiered intervention framework that integrates academic, behavioral, and social-emotional supports that are universally infused and enhanced by a trauma-informed understanding of the mental health challenges that may underlie students’ needs. In addition to providing trauma-informed practices that address the needs of students who experience multiple stressors, UE promotes a drastic systematic shift in special education and mental health service delivery by adopting a mindset of collaboration and inclusion. Standard practice across the nation is to view students with disabilities and/or mental health challenges as a specific cohort of students for whom intensive interventions must be specifically targeted and delivered in exclusive environments by trained specialists. UE recognizes that special education interventions must involve the whole school community and benefit all students.

VI. Update on Bringing Families Home Program (Information Item)

Justice Raye introduced Will Lightbourne and Ali Sutton from the California Department of Social Services to discuss the Bringing Families Home (BFH) program. By way of background, the BFH program, created by Assembly Bill 1603 (Chapter 25, Statutes of 2016), is intended to help reduce the number of families in the child welfare system experiencing homelessness, increase family reunification, and prevent foster care placements. The program targets homeless families involved with the child welfare system and is designed to offer housing supports in order for families to successfully reunify. BFH follows a Housing First approach and uses evidence-based interventions, such as Rapid Rehousing or Supportive Housing. The type of housing interventions are determined by the family’s level of need. Finally, collaboration and coordination with homeless program, child welfare, and juvenile dependency courts is critical to program success. The 2016-17 Budget Act allocated \$9,694,000 in local assistance, available through June 2019. BFH is a state-funded program with a dollar-for-dollar county match requirement. The Department allocated funds in May 2017 to 12 county child welfare agencies: Kings, Los Angeles, Orange, Sacramento, San Diego, San Francisco, San Luis Obispo, Santa Clara, Santa Cruz, Solano, Sonoma, and Yolo.

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VII. Public Comment and Adjournment to Committee Meetings

Secretary Dooley and Justice Raye thanked everyone for their participation and adjourned the meeting.