

CALIFORNIA CHILD WELFARE COUNCIL

March 2, 2022 Meeting Discussion Highlights

(Note: Due to the Pandemic, the meeting was Virtual, through Zoom technology.)

Present: Vance Raye, Co-Chair; Mark Ghaly, Co-Chair; Michelle Baass, Nancy Bargmann, Dana Blackwell, Sheila Boxley, Isaac Bryan, Sanja Bugay, Ebony Chambers, Roger DeLeon, Leonard Edwards, Janay Eustace, Larry Fluharty, Bob Friend, Leticia Galyean, Patrick Gardner, Leslie Heimov, Kathryn Icenhower, Kimberly Johnson, Jim Kooler, Karen Larsen, Sharon Lawrence, Katherine Lucero, Michael Olenick, Amy Price, Dan Prince, Cheryl Rave, Cherie Schroeder, Shawna Schwarz, Chris Stoner-Mertz, Daniel Webster, Jevon Wilkes, Christine Williams

Absent: Sarah Belton; Stacy Boulware Eurie, Heather Bowlds, Bobby Cagle, Douglas Hatchimonji, Martin Hoshino; Melissa Hurtado; Deborah Kelch; Brian Maienschein; Aubrey Manuel; Vaneshia Reed; Trent Rhorer, Susan Rubio, Libby Sanchez, Lindsay Tornatore, Sarah Tyson; Leecia Welch

Call to Order and Introductions (Seventh Zoom Meeting for CWC)

Staff noted that the meeting was going to be recorded. The meeting was called to order at 9:34 a.m. Secretary Mark Ghaly, Co-Chair of the Child Welfare Council. He personally welcomed Council members, Justice Vance Raye, and members of the public. He introduced and welcomed new members to the council: Katherine Larsen, Executive Director, California Health & Human Services (retired Judge); Christine Williams, Chief Judge, Wilton Rancheria Tribal Court; Jim Kooler, Special Consultant, California Department of Health Care Services. He also acknowledged Council Member, Ebony Chambers for moving the needle and being a change maker in Sacramento.

i. Approval of the September 8, 2021, December 1, 2021, and January 20, 2022 Interim Meetings Discussion Highlights (Informational Item)

Justice Vance Raye directed Council Members to the Discussion Highlights document that had been posted and sent to them prior to the meeting. He asked for comments, and/or suggested revisions from the Council and the public. There being none, he called for a consensus vote. In the absence of any revisions or comments, the highlights were approved.

ii. How We Focus to Reach Our Desired Future State

(Discussion of 2022-2023 Priority Focus for Child Welfare Council)

Cheryl Blanchette facilitated this discussion concerning priorities for the Child Welfare Council over the next two years. The dialogue consisted of the role of the Council, its members, and the work of the various committees. Justice Raye and Secretary Ghaly expressed their support and enthusiasm for this discussion with expectations that it will ultimately prove to be beneficial to the families in California.

Angie Schwartz, Deputy Director of the Department of Social Services shared key data about the structures and supports within our system that have been put in place over the last several years that will ensure children stay within their own families or connected to their families, relatives, and communities. This data will tell how we are doing with utilizing the structures. We are looking to find opportunities that will allow us to proactively strengthen the opportunities we have and to embody the voice of the parents, children, and caregivers. Many various tools have been developed that we can use to assist families in stages along the way. We are looking for the best way to utilize funds in a more robust way and to continually assess what is good in our system. While we do not have a lot of data, we do know that we have opportunities to engage the whole family which is important for us to keep our children connected to their families. We have seen a 53% increase for first entries that have a first placement with a family member. There has been a 92% increase among first entries with foster care with the predominant placement to a relative or extended family member. 75% of youth that had the first placement into a relative home remains in the same care 12 months later. 73% of children that are placed with relatives are placed together with all of their siblings. This creates the much needed stability our children need and reduces the trauma experienced in that separation. We do have a profound impact on the trajectory of children's lives. This presentation can be found here: [Keeping Families Together, Child Welfare System](#).

Cheryl reviewed the Child Welfare Council's vision and mission statements and an abbreviated list of their guiding principles. The hope for the outcome of this discussion is to be firm together about the direction of the Council and the direction of the committees aligned with that for the next two years.

Cheryl posed to the membership a few questions to consider in this discussion:

- 1) Do you see a role for yourself and your organization in that broad focus?
- 2) Do you see opportunities in that focus?
- 3) Do you feel it is too narrow?

Leonard Edwards: In my 30 – 40 years working in the child welfare system, I believe that family finding and placement with relatives is the most important development. We do have a model in California. Los Angeles places 84% of its removals with relatives in a timely fashion. This is a good example to follow and not waiting the 30 days stated in the 2009 family legislation, but do it immediately. According to data presented by Daniel Webster at U.C. Berkley, the state average is around 32%. California can lead the country if we follow the Los Angeles model and do it timely.

Cathy Senderling-McDonald: How can we remove unnecessary removals and not having phone calls? We want to keep children in families but also in communities with their biological families if possible. A prevention proposal was adopted in July as part of the current year budget which will help to provide more robust prevention services where as partners discussions can be held with community leaders, families with lived-in experience, local service providers, and other important community partners to figure out how we can support each other even if they are not a highly evidence-based level, how we can help to grow those kinds of programs and eventually get to that point. How can we, as a Council work to provide input into a system such as this which has not yet been implemented? What advice or recommendations would we want to give to that effort?

Sheila Boxley: This started with children at imminent risk, people already at the attention of the child welfare system. Once you are at imminent risk, you've already had trauma. Families have already experienced all sorts of issues. That parents haven't received the support needed. We need to be doing things in advance of that, and we have to make it a priority. It starts somewhere in the middle of prevention, not with primary prevention. The community-based sector, particularly the smaller organizations are desperate because they are overwhelmed with COVID and with all of the other issues that have come down in these last couple of years. There must be a vision that addresses primary prevention and a more upstream kind of thing. We have some very clear information and valid research that shows return on investment for community-based services. Our state is blessed to have over 500 family resource centers. We have opportunities that we need to utilize to make a system that starts from the very beginning.

Dana Blackwell: The presentation by Angie is the beginning of a road map and is a way where we can remain accountable to each other as a Council and to the children and families that we serve. We should continue to dive deeper into the data so we understand exactly where

the system is challenging for families and how we can think about being collaborative, thinking about strategies, promoting strategies to address where families are stuck in the system. California has a big re-entry problem. We get kids home, and they come back to us; or we have kids that are stuck in the system and require a high-intensity of need. If we understand our data, we can center our efforts to undo some of those problems so that we are helping to bring about healing for children and families in a more expedited way. We need to look at strategies in support of them moving out of our system. The prevention piece is incredibly important. Understanding those funding streams that aren't necessarily held with Child Welfare but all of our broad systems that are reflected here. We often place the problem of children and families at the doorstep of Child Welfare. We have to promote this sense of shared accountability. Each of our organizations contribute in many ways to alleviate the issue.

Bob Friend: We need to look at how well we are engaging families in a child and family team process. We barely get moms in half the time. We get young people in less than half the time. We get dads and other family in barely a quarter of the time. We have failed to develop this mechanism to create a collaborative practice model to create family centered practice which has been determined to be much more effective than agency centered practice. So when we participate in agency centered practices, we are doing less effective practices. We know that this will result in poor outcomes for children and families. We're actually harming people when we don't engage families to participate. We also cannot change the course of disparity, disproportionality, and equity without making sure that the affected people aren't involved and included. Our focus must be on family finding whether it be from the very beginning so that we are reducing and limiting the disconnect from the start but also on an ongoing basis so that we also include the people whose lives are impacted the most. If we don't do that, no matter what other laws and things that we pass and initiative we carry, without that through-line of active participation of children and family in their own lives for decisions that impact them will never really turn the system. We will still be operating from that notion of protecting children from their families as opposed to how do we help families stay together and keep themselves safe in their community and support the raising of their children. This is the adaptive change we have to make. Historically we looked at technical solutions (training people). We need to think and act differently. We have to interfere systemically with behaviors that support the old way of thinking around keeping children safe from their families.

Kathryn Icenhower: There is so much that we could do. There is so much opportunity here because we have the representation across the different departments, across critical agencies that could work together and join all of those initiatives that we have in this state. So many of our families do not need to go in that door. It could be a simple thing such as helping out with one month of rent that could stop an entire trajectory resulting in an entire family in the child

welfare system. Who is in charge at the state? While it is not the entire responsibility of the child welfare system, they could take on a leadership role to help and blend and link those resources together. There are so many issues out there that are treatable (e.g. substance abuse, mental health). We could mitigate the risks for these families and keep them together if we joined our resources.

Leslie Heimov: We can't forget about the children in current care and the families that have current open cases. We don't have QPI in every county. We need to take stock of known initiatives, projects, or programs that are effective and make sure that we are utilizing them to the fullest rather than throwing them out the window and starting all over again. Nurse-family partnership is an example of a known program that is not leveraged enough. Housing also not only applies to families but non-minor dependents with open cases. On the family connections piece, we need to be clear about preventing child abuse vs. preventing entry into child welfare. Those words have been used interchangeably and we need to clear about which one we are talking about. Regarding preventing entry into child welfare, because no one has mentioned anything about the court's role, I would like to talk a little about that. Reasonable efforts is not followed. It gets a rubber stamp 98% of the time. Until we change the way it is implemented or change the law, it will continue to be a pretty irrelevant standard. Boot-strapping also occurs where a case is adopted, time passes, and the family circumstances have changed but the court remains inextricably committed to the original case plan for the original allegations. We are unwilling on the court's side to look at things fresh. This could be changed if there was some judicial leadership and agency buy-in on that problem on the court's side.

Christine Williams: With regard to the native population, I saw us in the over-representation field. For example, with the child and family teaming, there was a distinct lack of including the tribal representative there which is shocking at this point in time. It's been decades since the child welfare act was passed, but beyond that, California has implemented our own practice around native families. Yet is not reflected consistently across our commissions, efforts, and laws. It would be helpful to know who is in the data mentioned earlier. Is this a majority of people within tribes from California or is it from outside of California? Who is included in that over-represented population? There are a lot of innovations going on. The ones that are working seem to be the ones on the county level because each county is different. While we are over-represented as a community in the child welfare system, it still makes up a small amount of cases when you look at the overall population, and it's a challenge. We do need to focus on family teaming but ensure that we are including tribal representation because it is not only required by law, but it is best practice.

Cheryl mentioned that we have not touched on youth and families in the way the Council works. With that being one of the guiding principles, how can we be more proactive around

hearing about engaging in an authentic dialogue around the direction?

Chris Stoner-Mertz: It is difficult to change culture. As we try to attend to how we more actively and deliberately engage family and youth at all levels. What are we doing to uplift communities? How are we doing with economic issues, housing, and all the many other things mentioned? We have to change the way we think and how we do the work. That takes time and all of us providing direct feedback and holding each other accountable at all levels from those providing supervision for case work to state leadership levels. We need to continue to do this and always be asking the question: “Where is the family in this?” Our organization has a budget request to fund family finding which we haven’t done at all levels of the system. We need to focus on engaging families for children not just early on but also for those who have been in the system for way too long. We often aren’t attending to that. Those are the children that end up in longer term foster care. We need to attend to behavioral health supports at all levels to ensure that we aren’t only funding those but coordinating those services including medical. How are we utilizing public health nurses? Are the services we provide truly reflecting community defined practices not just what would be considered our traditional behavioral health interventions. Are they addressing the needs of LGBTQ youth who are either in care or at risk of care? We need to focus on data. There doesn’t appear to be any data on family-finding and engagement activities for children who are at risk of or are in the system. This data is needed to hold ourselves accountable to the work. There are also implementation related to foster family agencies that are still being worked out. We have struggled around the level of care implementation. We need to continue to dig in at all levels to ensure we have the right services to families and children at the time they need it.

Sanja Bugay: We don’t to lose the complex kids in our system struggling with mental health. We are missing sufficient placement and services options. We are missing system alignment. Until we are all equally responsible, child welfare will always carry, because we are looking for placements as opposed to looking for long-term solutions and supports. It is difficult to blend and fund at the provider and county level. The initial solutions matter. The CFTMs occurring don’t have the right partners at the table so incomplete decisions are being made. That upfront piece of engagement and commitment is huge. Also we should think about workforce development and working with the schools on expanding the number of social workers in our system. We need workforce development and working with universities to get our number of graduates up.

Roger DeLeon: There are a lot of things that I believe I will be able to bring. There are things specific to my county, but also working across counties. We need to understand the meaning of prevention. Parents that have come asking for help ended up being part of the system. We need to listen to what the parents really need and provide them with the proper

resources and/or provide proper training instead of simply writing up reports. We also need to look into welcoming the fathers. Many fathers feel as though their voices are not heard. We should bring in individuals with lived experiences to be there before decisions are made. CFTs are wonderful when they are used right. We want our voices to be heard and made to feel that we have something to contribute.

Amy Price: We need to take a more expansive view of data. Yes, CFTs are great but we need to take a look at who is showing up and consider if people feel safe and if they feel they can voice their opinions. Are there power imbalances occurring? Bringing in the voice of family members, caregivers, community members will help. With regard to the regional centers, the question is more about who should be at the table. There are key players missing. We also need to look at the criminal justice system on kids. Blended funding is way too complicated. We need to have collective accountability for the outcomes. We need to distinguish child welfare from the child welfare system. We need to expand our tools we have in our toolbox to improve child welfare and child wellbeing. We also need to distinguish between placement and treatment. We need to meet the needs of complex kids. That needs to be separate from family and placement.

Patrick Gardner: When legislation was drafted in the creation of the Child Welfare Council, there were three fundamental goals that we were trying to accomplish:

- 1) To raise the level of children's issues politically in Sacramento
- 2) To coordinate all of the children's system players
- 3) To engage stakeholders with the agencies to help improve performance of the Child Welfare System

Does the proposal brought forth by Secretary and the Judge advance those goals? What do you think would be different? What are we not going to do or what we going to do as a result of the proposed of a vision or change of focus? With regard to coordinating all of the children's system players, it is an assertion that we have a child welfare goal which seems like a separate focus as opposed to a coordinated focus. This may work against the coordination component. With regard to engaging the system partners, the process seems to be going in the wrong direction. The stage agency brought this proposal to all of the stakeholders and gave them a couple of minutes to respond. This was not the approach of the Child Welfare Council in the past where the focus and goals came from the committees and council members and then became the core of our focus.

Jevon Wilkes: These are our children. We should be anchored to say that. These are our families. If they fail, California fails. It's hard to be in spaces where it is a fight every day to be encouraged, empowered, and to continue moving forward. We need to anchor ourselves in seeing these children and families as part of our own. Orphans come into our system because

their parents have passed due to COVID. We need to anchor ourselves on the thing that brings ourselves together and that is our humanity. It will not thrive if we continue to allow our children to be attacked. Our children are dying. We are caring for our children and our families.

Cheryl stated that we will take all of the information that was shared and discuss it with the Steering Committee with an opportunity to wrestle with that and come back to the members and the co-chairs to explore how to deepen the conversation, planning, and thinking about our focus and what that means. She further mentioned that with regard to the work of the committees we are anticipating having the focus refined. She suggested they take the focus of family connection into the committee conversations and explore that further and the opportunities aligned with that.

Judge Raye suggested that the next meeting should have time carved out to discuss the comment brought forward by Patrick Gardner.

iii. Adoption of Behavioral Health Committee Universal Service Array (Action Item)

Steinberg Institute's Chief Executive Officer, Karen Larsen and Chris Stoner-Mertz, Executive Director of California Alliance of Child & Family Services shared about the work of the Behavioral Health Committee. For this meeting, the focus is on the Universal Array Document. This is a document that contains a vision filled with much deserved things for California children and youth in terms of behavioral healthcare. Many stakeholders and county associations partnered in completing this document. Karen reviewed the many components involved in the creation of this document. Chris covered topics such as intensive home and community-based supports, therapeutic foster care, wrap-around services, behavior services, etc. The document can be found here: [Universal Array of Services for Child Welfare Involved Youth and Youth at Risk of Involvement](#). The hope is that it can be approved in order to move forward and use this as a guiding, living document. Justice Raye informed the members that this is an action item and a vote will be taken. After addressing a few questions, comments, or concerns from the members, Justice Raye stated that we will utilize the customary Approval by Acclamation method. He asked if there were any dissensions and/or disapprovals of the proposal. Hearing none, he declared the measure approved by unanimous vote.

iv. Strategies to Prevent Deaths of Foster Youth Related to Suicide, Overdose, and Other Violent

Incidents (Information Item)

Secretary Ghaly called on Leslie Heimov, Executive Director of Children’s Law Center of California to share about strategies to prevent suicide, overdose, and other violent incidents related to foster youth and the opportunities for the Council to help these endeavors. Leslie introduced her action team members who jointly shared in this presentation. Together they shared facts concerning youth deaths from poisoning and the demographics of youth deaths by suicide. They emphasized the need to push out information regarding existing solutions. There is life-saving medication available and many can benefit if they are educated about how it works. The Director of the Safe House Project explained that the Advisory Board has been charged with providing input to the state, counties, and organizations in order to ensure that impacted young people are served. It consists of lived experienced experts. They spoke of a webinar that they presented covering three critical topics: harm reduction, youth engagement, and housing. Attorney Kate Walker Brown spoke of the very highly rated webinar. She mentioned that the Board is available to everyone on the Council. This Board has helped develop caregiver training along the West Coast. They work alongside judges and lawyers providing harm reduction guidance for courtroom settings. They are working with the child trafficking unit at CDSS. It is strongly encouraged to get them involved in the earliest stages of development. Leslie mentioned that today’s meeting will include discussions about how to help boys who have been sexually exploited.

v. Emerging Recommendations from a 13 County Data Workgroup on Tracking Substance Abuse Disorder in Child Welfare Services (Information Item)

Judge Raye called upon Daniel Webster, Principal Investigator at U.C. Berkeley to share the works of the Data Workgroup that has been focusing on substance use and child welfare. Daniel introduced colleague, Howard (?) who was a former member of the Council for five years. Howard shared about providing education concerning medically assisted treatment and also to bring in some of the new neuroscience and the lens of it around addiction. There are gaps within the SUDS data in the Child Welfare System. Daniel reported that on the national average of reporting for alcohol and drug abuse, California is low on the scale. In a neighborhood of 40%, we are below 13%. This reporting hampers to help the families and their needs. There is a need to do better particularly in the area of community-based support around substance abuse disorder. Family First gives us an opportunity to do better. More of this presentation can be found here: [Emerging recommendations from a 13 County Data Workgroup on Tracking](#)

vi. Committee and Taskforce Updates

Secretary Ghaly called for committee/task force updates, which primarily focused on what would be discussed at the afternoon meetings

Child Development & Successful Youth Transitions Committee: Jevon Wilkes reported that the meeting today will be focused on structuring things to move toward the next stages and directions so that invitations can be extended for others to attend at the next Council meeting.

Behavioral Health Committee: Chris announced that this meeting will focus on the next steps for the Array of Services and that there will also be a presentation from school-based mental health.

Data Linkage & Information Sharing Committee: Daniel shared that this committee will be discussing the recommendations brought forth and also to reflect on the prevention piece discussed today.

Permanency Committee: Bob shared that there will be a presentation from Connect Our Kids. There will be a live demo process where they will actually incorporate a search directly into their software. This will be recorded so that it can be shared with those who are unable to attend. They will also discuss the Council's goals and ensure the committee is aligned with that. Finally, there will be conversations about some of the work in Pennsylvania concerning the Alliance Proposal and fully funding Family Finding work statewide. He thanked the Committee chairs for their reports.

Prevention & Early Intervention Committee: Kathryn thanked all of the Council members who attended the Interim Council Member meeting in January, 2022 and the help provided to get the FFPSA Implementation Recommendation approved. Today, CDSS will be sharing where the Department is on the draft plan and how our recommendations may have or have not impacted that process. We will then look deeper into those recommendations to provide additional feedback to the department.

Youth & Community Restoration Committee: Katherine announced that they are formally resurrecting this subcommittee group. A meeting will be held after the next CWC Quarterly meeting. There is an intention to have a meeting held by the end of March, 2022. They are currently working with staff to get this set up.

Secretary Ghaly thanked all of the Committee chairs for their reports and announced the upcoming meetings for the remainder of this year:

June 1, 2022

September 7, 2022

December 7, 2022

vii. Public Comment and Adjournment to Committee Meetings

Justice Raye asked for any comments from the members of the public. Public member Carol Brown and Christine Chang shared and Justice Raye thanked them for their comments. He also noted that conference lines, Zoom line numbers and links for the afternoon committee meetings are on the agenda.

Justice Raye thanked everyone for their participation in today's meeting and closed the meeting

Meeting adjourned at 12:44 pm.