

## **Meeting Highlights for June 4, 2025 California Child Welfare Council Meeting**

### **Quick recap**

The Child Welfare Council meeting covered court proceedings and observation opportunities, with judges discussing their calendars and challenges, followed by plans for court observations. The meeting then focused on the Children and Youth Behavioral Health Initiative, which aims to transform services and supports for children, youth, and families through various programs and initiatives. The discussion concluded with updates on state budget concerns, the launch of the Mandated Reporting Advisory Committee, and plans for continuous quality improvement and data transparency within the youth justice system.

### **Summary**

#### **Child Welfare Court Observation Planning**

The Child Welfare Council meeting focused on court proceedings and observation opportunities. Judges from various counties, including Orange, Santa Clara, and San Diego, presented on the types of calendars they preside over and the unique challenges they face. The council discussed plans for court observations, limiting groups to 5 people to avoid disrupting proceedings. Judges emphasized the complexity of cases, including issues with attorney availability and interpreter shortages. The conversation ended with a call for members to provide feedback after observing court proceedings.

#### **Children's Mental Health Service Transformation**

The meeting focused on the Children and Youth Behavioral Health Initiative, presented by Dr. Sohil Sood and Brittany Blake. They highlighted alarming statistics on mental health issues among children and youth, emphasizing the need for better support systems. The initiative aims to transform services and supports for children, youth, and families, with a focus on healthcare, schools, and communities. They discussed various programs, including social and emotional learning in schools, peer-to-peer support programs, and training for educators on trauma-informed care. The meeting also touched on a new fee schedule program that allows schools to receive revenue for providing mental health services, making California the first state to implement such a system.

#### **School Resources and Foster Care**

The discussion focused on disparities in social-emotional learning resources between schools, with Allenby sharing their experience of how their child's school provided dedicated support for transitions while other schools lack similar resources. Larry Fluharty,

California Foster Care Ombudsperson, highlighted how foster youth often face additional challenges during school transitions. The conversation then shifted to a fee schedule program that has expanded to include nearly 500 school districts across the state, aimed at providing sustainable funding for school staff positions in underserved areas. The conversation ended with a review of over \$400 million in grants awarded by the Department of Health Care Services to support various community programs, including parenting support, trauma-informed care, early childhood services, and stigma reduction initiatives.

### **State Initiative Spending and Sustainability**

The discussion focused on the spending and sustainability of a state initiative launched in July 2021, which has allocated over \$2 billion so far, with some programs being time-bound while others are in perpetuity. The team is working on producing a guide to help organizations sustain their efforts, and there are ongoing efforts to connect the initiative with other state behavioral health programs. In the digital space, the initiative has processed over half a million dollars in claims, with about 20% being rejected due to minor errors that can be quickly remedied as schools learn the billing process.

### **Virtual Youth Mental Health Platforms**

The meeting discussed two virtual service platforms in California: Bright Life Kids for parents and caregivers of children aged 0-12, and Saluna for youth aged 13-25. Bright Life Kids offers a content library and access to trained coaches for behavioral health support, while Saluna provides self-guided resources and coaching support available 10 AM to 9 PM. Britney shared her positive experience using Bright Life Kids to help her son navigate middle school transitions, noting the quick access to coaching compared to the 3-month wait for traditional medical services. The platforms have served over 267,000 youth in California, with half coming from lower income quartiles, and have been particularly effective in providing timely emotional support and crisis intervention.

### **Youth Mental Health Resource Initiatives**

The meeting discussed various resources and initiatives aimed at supporting youth mental health and well-being. Allenby highlighted the availability of webinars, social media tools, and a new journaling app called the Mirror Journal, which offers multiple ways to express thoughts and track emotions. The discussion also covered three statewide campaigns: "Take Space to Pause" for reducing stress and stigma, "Live Beyond" to raise awareness about adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), and a campaign featuring youth spokespersons sharing their experiences. Amy Price inquired about the source of claims for the all-payer fee, and Allenby explained that it likely comes from local educational agencies through schools, though further details were promised.

## **Youth Support and ACE Recovery**

The meeting focused on discussing the impact of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and strategies for supporting youth in out-of-home care. Jessica shared her personal experiences with ACEs and how gaming and therapy helped her cope, emphasizing the importance of community and resources. Allenby Building Manager highlighted a suicide prevention campaign called "Never a Burden" aimed at youth who feel disconnected from their families. Council member Bob emphasized the need for love and belonging in healing from ACEs, while also acknowledging the challenges faced by youth in out-of-home care. The discussion concluded with a call for collaboration to provide support and resources to youth in various settings.

## **State Budget and Federal Updates**

The meeting focused on the May Revision budget and Federal updates, highlighting a significant projected shortfall of \$12 billion for the 2025-2026 fiscal year due to reduced state revenues and increased program enrollments. The state budget does not account for potential Federal changes, such as those from the reconciliation bill, which could impact programs like Medi-Cal and CalFresh. Key priorities include behavioral health transformation, healthcare access, and affordability, with proposals to adjust benefits and workforce policies. Director Boss shared positive outcomes from community support programs under CalAIM, emphasizing lower emergency room and inpatient utilization. The final state budget is expected by the end of the month, with Federal decisions likely after July 4th.

## **Mandated Reporting Advisory Committee Launch**

The Mandated Reporting Advisory Committee (MRAC) was officially launched on May 20th, with Deputy Director Angie Schwartz highlighting the collaborative effort among California Health and Human Services Agency, Department of Social Services, and the Prevention and Early Intervention Committee. Dana Blackwell, co-chair of the Prevention and Early Intervention Committee, presented updates on MRAC's progress, including the selection of members from community organizations, Cal HHS departments, and state associations, and the development of a strategic plan to implement the 14 recommendations. Assembly Member Corey Jackson opened the first MRAC meeting by emphasizing the importance of pushing for change, and a bill (AB 601) has been proposed to codify MRAC in law and ensure access to the gold standard curriculum. The Prevention and Early Intervention Committee will meet at 1:30 to discuss updates on child abuse prevention and begin planning for a child and family well-being system.

## **Youth Justice System Priorities Update**

The meeting focused on several key topics, including the launch of a new care system and its impact on federal reporting, statewide continuous quality improvement, and outcomes tracking. The group discussed two main priorities for 2025: data transparency within the youth justice system and diversion practices for early intervention and restorative justice. Chris Stoner Mertz announced her departure from the Behavioral Health Committee and introduced her successor, Pete Weldy, who will take over in September. The meeting also covered updates on AB 102 data, a presentation on supporting LGBTQ+ youth experiencing commercial sexual exploitation, and the release of a new CSEC Action Team website.