



COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO

AGENDA ITEM

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

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First District

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Fourth District

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Fifth District

DATE: August 16, 2022

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TO: Board of Supervisors

SUBJECT

RECEIVE UPDATE ON CHILD WELFARE SERVICES REVIEW WORKING GROUP RECOMMENDATIONS (DISTRICTS: ALL)

OVERVIEW

On August 10, 2018, at the request of San Diego County Board of Supervisors (Board), a time-limited working group known as the Child Welfare Services (CWS) Review Working Group (Working Group), was established to complete an assessment and report on the state of the County of San Diego (County) child welfare system. The Working Group, comprised of members of the County Child Abuse Prevention Coordinating Council and community experts and stakeholders, was tasked to survey and identify system improvement needs for the County Health and Human Services Agency, CWS, including needs for quality assurance, personnel training, policy barriers, and outcome data to ensure the health and safety of dependent youth in foster care. On December 11, 2018 (12), the Working Group provided its final report to the Board with 88 specific recommendations for consideration by the Board. Between August 2018 and March 2022, collective actions were taken to review, identify, and implement systemic, operational, and practice improvements within CWS to ensure the safety, health, and well-being of youth in foster care.

Today's action requests the Board to receive the CWS Working Group Recommendations presentation on the completed 88 recommendations. This item supports the County's vision of a just, sustainable, and resilient future for all, specifically those communities and populations in San Diego County that have been historically left behind, as well as our ongoing commitment to the regional *Live Well San Diego* vision of healthy, safe, and thriving communities. This will be accomplished by providing equitable access to quality, trauma-focused services, resources, and supports to strengthen families and ensure that children are healthy, safe, and thriving and are supported by high-quality resource families and a well-trained child welfare workforce.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

1. Receive the *Child Welfare Services Review Working Group Recommendations* presentation.

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EQUITY IMPACT STATEMENT

The County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency, Child Welfare Services (CWS) provides a spectrum of family strengthening, prevention, and protective services and supports to youth and families that are culturally responsive, youth-focused, and family-centered. While advancing the child welfare system, CWS engaged youth and families, the Child and Family Strengthening Advisory Board (CFSAB) of San Diego County and its subcommittees, the foster care community, child and family advocates, CWS staff, and system and legal partners to solicit ideas and recommendations on how to achieve positive outcomes and results as a family, community, and system level. The expanded engagement provided equitable opportunities for the community to contribute to change, increase racial equity, and strengthen existing partnerships to maximize positive impact in the community. Throughout the three-year course of implementing enhancements and change, CWS maintained clear and transparent communication on efforts, relevant data, and progress through monthly updates and presentations at the CFSAB meetings and subcommittee meetings.

It is through this participatory approach and engagement that CWS, in collaboration with the CFSAB and stakeholders, was able to address and complete all 88 recommendations for a strengthened child welfare system. CWS remains committed to supporting children, youth, and families by providing just and equitable opportunities to achieve family well-being and providing resource families and child welfare staff with the supports, training, and resources needed to help families thrive.

FISCAL IMPACT

There is no fiscal impact associated with the recommendation. Future related recommendations may have fiscal impacts which staff will return to the San Diego County Board of Supervisors for consideration and approval. There will be no change in net General Fund cost and no additional staff years.

BUSINESS IMPACT STATEMENT

N/A

ADVISORY BOARD STATEMENT

This item was presented to the Child and Family Strengthening Advisory Board as an informational item on July 8, 2022.

BACKGROUND

On August 10, 2018, at the request of San Diego County Board of Supervisors (Board), a time-limited working group known as the Child Welfare Services (CWS) Review Working Group (Working Group), was established to complete an assessment and report on the state of the County of San Diego (County) child welfare system. The Working Group consisted of 13 members representing a continuum of community stakeholders including former foster youth, foster parent advocates, Just In Time for Foster Youth, CAPCC, Angels Foster Family Network, Casey Family Programs, County Health and Human Services Agency, County Counsel, Children’s Legal Services of San Diego, Dependency Legal Services of San Diego, and the Superior Court Juvenile Division. In response to the Board’s request to complete an assessment and report of the County child welfare system, the Working Group began reviewing County, State, and national data,

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policies, and child welfare research to inform recommendations, and engaged with foster care community experts, legal partners, and CWS staff to gather input for improvement recommendations. After two months of discussions and expansive engagement, in October 2018, the Working Group completed and submitted a detailed Project Status Report to the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO). The Working Group also created subcommittees to perform deep-dive reviews in five broad categories which included:

- Child Well-Being
- Child Welfare Services Culture, Structure, and Operations
- Resource Family Quality Improvement
- Protective Services Workers
- Legal and Policy Barriers

On December 11, 2018 (12), following multiple meetings and comprehensive considerations, the Working Group completed and submitted to the Board the CWS Working Group report containing 88 recommendations (Attachment A). At this meeting, the Board directed the CAO to form a subcommittee, which included two Board members, to work with HHSA and the CAPCC to review the Working Group report and its recommendations. After a thorough review of the Working Group report and its recommendations, in March 2019 CWS published a report that provides a detailed response to each recommendation and a plan for implementation for those that had not already been implemented.

Responding to the recommendations to ensure stronger community input and transparency about the child welfare system, the Board adopted Ordinance No. 10598 (N.S.) repealing and replacing provisions in the San Diego County Administrative Code (establishing the CAPCC) to create the Child and Family Strengthening Advisory Board of San Diego County (CFSAB) (March 26, 2019 (11)). The new advisory board was created to enhance the ability of the County to prevent and respond to child abuse and neglect and have broad oversight over the County's child welfare system. Additionally, the CFSAB was charged with monitoring the implementation of the recommendations.

CWS also formed an internal Implementation Workgroup consisting of 15 social workers and supervising social worker staff representing all regions and CWS programs. Staff reviewed all of the 88 recommendations and contributed input on implementation strategies that would successfully effect change. The CWS Implementation Workgroup engaged with the CFSAB on recommendations and implementation updates.

Additionally, as the advisory body overseeing the efforts to address the recommendations and to maximize community expertise, resources and supports to aid CWS in implementation efforts and needs, the CFSAB established subcommittees to address recommendations in the CWS Working Group report. Recommendations were subsequently grouped into three focus areas to include Organizational Structure, Workforce Development, and Child and Family Services.

After dedicating a myriad of resources and time, and sharing expertise and lived experience, CWS, in partnership with the CFSAB and its subcommittees, as well as the foster care community and stakeholders, concluded a three-year major undertaking and completed all 88 recommendations in March 2022.

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Significant Accomplishments

Over the course of three years, in support of a strengthened and improved child welfare system, CWS, CFSAB and subcommittees, and community partners contributed to strategic efforts that address each of the 88 recommendations. The table below highlights key accomplishments in the three focus areas.

Focus Area	Key Accomplishments
<p>Organizational Structure</p>	<p>Enhanced the CWS organizational structure through the following actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Restructured the CWS Office of the Ombudsman to provide three options to address concerns effectively and includes the CWS Office of the Ombudsman, Resource Parent Ombudsman, and HHSA Agency Compliance Office. • Integrated regional placement units under two managers to ensure consistent practice and consolidated all specialty program placement units into one to provide specialized placement services and supports. • Created SDCares4Kids.com, a recruitment and resource website where potential, new, and current resource families can access information about the resource family approval process, foster and adoptive resource family resources, and mentor, volunteer, and advocate opportunities. Since its launch in June 2021, there have been an average of 2,625 visits to the website each month. • Acquired the Binti software to help with resource family application and approval management, sibling placement, and child and resource caregiver matching. Binti is a dual interfacing system for families and CWS staff that provides easy to navigate tools for families to upload, sign, and retrieve documents and allows CWS staff to complete documents in real time to expedite the approval and renewal process. • As of July 1, 2022, 89 percent of resource families in the approval process have access to Binti online.
<p>Workforce Development</p>	<p>Increased supports for CWS staff through the following actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Added three staff psychologists to address and reduce the impact of secondary traumatic stress (STS) and promote staff resilience and well-being. • Applied the use of the Centralized Assignment Tool, a workload equity tool to help facilitate equitable workload management, determine staffing levels, and promote productivity. • Created the Workforce and Training Development Unit to provide newly hired social worker staff with support and training and coaching in the field and ensure consistency across all HHSA regions. • Expanded trauma supportive services to staff through ongoing group and individual follow-ups regarding critical incidents. As of July 2022, 90 staff have accessed trauma-informed supports.

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trained staff on Components for Effective Clinician Experience and Reducing Trauma (CE-CERT) to increase staff awareness and understanding of the effects of STS in the workforce. In Fiscal Year 2021-22, 448 staff were trained in CE-CERT.
<p>Child and Family Services</p>	<p>Strengthened the delivery of child and family services through the following actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Created a special emergency response unit staffed with dedicated social workers with specialized training in interviewing children to investigate reports of maltreatment while in foster care. • Increased sibling placements and interactions through the following actions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Successfully advocated to maintain youth at the A.B. and Jessie Polinsky Center (PCC) over ten days (if necessary) to keep sibling groups together while awaiting a home-based placement that will keep the sibling group intact. ○ Prioritized emergency resource family homes for sibling placements and partnered with Angels Foster Family Network to establish new guidelines to increase sibling placement capacity with their agency. ○ Updated CWS visitation policies requiring a sibling visitation plan and actions to provide frequent sibling interactions when siblings cannot be placed together. ○ As of January 2022, 76 percent (862) of children in care were placed with all or some siblings. • Increased supports for caregivers and equitable access to resources on various platforms including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Foster, adoptive, and kinship care education and trainings; ○ Resource parent mentor services; ○ Kinship Navigator services for relative caregivers; and ○ 24/7 phone-based and/or mobile response supports. • Reinforced supports for families through the following efforts: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Strengthened least restrictive interventions for families by creating a Voluntary Services policy requiring a multidisciplinary approach to determine family appropriateness and developed a brochure that informs families of their rights, program eligibility, and expectations; and ○ Revised contact guidelines for programs to provide enhanced quality face to face contacts appropriate to the family’s risk level.

In addition to the key accomplishments highlighted in the three focus areas, CWS continues to strengthen and improve child and staff safety and well-being, and supportive services at PCC. Currently, CWS is taking steps to address youth who go absent without leave from PCC. These

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efforts include enhancing behavioral health services and other supportive services through different partnerships. These partnerships provide mental health clinicians on site at PCC, safety and harm reduction strategies, telehealth services, mentoring, and the utilization of crisis response teams to quickly address behavioral health emergencies.

Sustaining Change

Addressing and completing all 88 recommendations was a collective effort that could not have been possible without the steadfast effort and dedication of the CFSAB and its subcommittees, foster care community, community at-large, system partners, and CWS staff. All contributors were essential collaborators in the journey to achieve a strengthened and trauma-informed child welfare system in San Diego County. Sustaining the effort requires continuous quality improvement and ongoing monitoring of progress to ensure the effectiveness of the actions taken to provide positive outcomes for youth and families, the foster care community, and CWS staff. CWS will continue to work with the CFSAB and subcommittees to monitor the outcomes and results of improvements and ensure transparency and continuous meaningful engagement with the community in identifying and addressing the needs of children, youth, and families interacting with the child welfare system. Additionally, CWS will seek opportunities to parallel actions from the Working Group recommendations with other CWS and/or County initiatives to help scale up collective efforts and maximize positive community outcomes. Completion of the recommendations sets the foundation for the continued work in transforming the way child welfare services are delivered and supports a pathway towards a better way for child and family well-being.

Today's action requests the Board to receive the CWS Working Group Recommendations presentation on the 88 completed recommendations of the CWS Working Group (December 11, 2018 (12)).

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LINKAGE TO THE COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO STRATEGIC PLAN

Today's proposed action to receive the Child Welfare Services Review Working Group Recommendations presentation supports the County of San Diego's 2022-2027 Strategic Plan Initiatives of Sustainability (Economy and Resiliency), Equity (Health and Economic Opportunity), Empower (Workforce, Transparency, and Accountability), and Community (Engagement, Quality of Life, Communications, and Partnership) by providing a strengthened child welfare system that ensures the safety and well-being of children and families and supports the foster care community and child welfare services staff.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Helen N. Robbins-Meyer".

HELEN N. ROBBINS-MEYER
Chief Administrative Officer

ATTACHMENT(S)

Attachment A – Child Welfare Services Working Group Recommendations