

**COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO  
BOARD OF SUPERVISORS  
TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 28, 2023**

**MINUTE ORDER NO. 21**

**SUBJECT: ESTABLISH THE CHILD AND FAMILY WELL-BEING DEPARTMENT  
WITHIN THE HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES AGENCY  
(DISTRICTS: ALL)**

**OVERVIEW**

The child welfare system has made significant changes over the past 15 years to improve the response to children who have been abused or neglected; however, more changes can be made to move beyond the status quo. In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic elevated the need to create equity for children and families and brought to light the urgency to undertake a fundamental transformation to a better way for child and family well-being. There is an imperative need to transform the child welfare system toward prevention, with a focus on the earliest of interventions, and an overall change to a more equitable approach to reducing child maltreatment.

To support this transformation the San Diego County Board of Supervisors (Board) has taken steps to increase supports for families, promote family strengthening efforts, and reduce the impact of trauma, adverse childhood experiences, and child maltreatment. In March 2022, as part of the State of the County Address, then Chair Nathan Fletcher announced that the County of San Diego (County) will establish a new department, Child and Family Well-Being.

After coordinating with staff, the community, departmental leadership, and contractor ICF International, today's action requests the Board's authorization to create the Child and Family Well-Being Department within the Health and Human Services Agency (HHSA), inclusive of County HHSA Child Welfare Services (CWS), First 5 Commission of San Diego (First 5 San Diego), and additional programs and services. In addition, today's action requests authorization to make any changes necessary to support the reorganization and partnership of CWS and First 5 San Diego into the Child and Family Well-Being Department. The creation of the Child and Family Well-Being Department provides the opportunity to integrate resources, programs, and services to support families and increase protective factors.

Today's item supports the County's vision of a just, sustainable, and resilient future for all, specifically for those communities and populations in San Diego County that have been historically disadvantaged and demonstrates an ongoing commitment to the regional *Live Well San Diego* vision of healthy, safe, and thriving communities. This will be accomplished by enhancing the coordination of upstream prevention strategies and services between community resources and the child welfare system to ensure children and families receive services and supports to attain and maintain a safe environment.

**RECOMMENDATION(S)**

**CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER**

1. Authorize the Chief Administrative Officer to establish the Child and Family Well-Being Department within the Health and Human Services Agency, inclusive of Child Welfare Services, First 5 San Diego, and additional programs and services for children and families, and reassign existing staff positions as needed.

2. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer to take any other actions to effectuate any changes necessary to implement the reorganization and partnership of Child Welfare Services and First 5 San Diego into the Health and Human Services Agency, Child and Family Well-Being Department.

**EQUITY IMPACT STATEMENT**

Research shows that experiencing material hardship, such as not having the resources or income to provide for basic necessities like food, clothing, and shelter, is associated with increased risk for child welfare involvement. Studies indicate that if families experience at least one material hardship, the likelihood of being investigated for neglect increases nearly three times and that if families experience multiple types of hardship (after experiencing no hardships), the likelihood of being involved in a child welfare investigation increases four times. About 60 percent of all reports to the Child Abuse Hotline are for neglect-related concerns, so prevention efforts are necessary to help mandated reporters, the community, and the workforce better define neglect/maltreatment versus economic hardship (poverty). The majority of child maltreatment reports come from mandated reporters within the education, law enforcement, medical, and mental health systems; however, many reports do not meet the definition of abuse. For example, only six percent of all reports to the Child Abuse Hotline made by school-based mandated reporters are substantiated. Economic disparities and systemic disadvantages have perpetuated disproportionate child welfare involvement among families of color and children of color are often over reported to the Hotline. The ethnic distribution of monthly averages of children in referrals for Fiscal Year 2021-22 includes:

Race	Percentage Referred to CWS Hotline	Percentage of Population*
Hispanic	45%	34%
White	26%	46%
Black	11%	5%
Asian/Pacific Islander	4%	11%
Native American	1%	.5%
Other	13%	3.5%

\*per 2020 SANDAG data

The statistics demonstrate the need to promote racial equity and reevaluate how current child and family serving systems respond to families with insufficient resources to meet their unique family needs.

While working to advance the child welfare system, the County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency, Child Welfare Services (CWS) engaged youth and families, the Child and Family Strengthening Advisory Board of San Diego County and 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 at 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. It is expected that by creating the more holistic Child and Family Well-Being Department, ethnic and socio-economic disparities can be reduced by increasing family and community partnership for children to remain safely in their homes.

**SUSTAINABILITY IMPACT STATEMENT**

The proposed action to establish the Child and Family Well-Being Department supports the County of San Diego’s Sustainability Goal #2 of providing just and equitable access by expanding the availability of supports and services on a continuum to all families without having to be part of the child welfare system while still maintaining those efforts to intervene and keep children safe in partnership with families when they cannot do it on their own. This action will provide the supports needed for families to gain resilience, independence, and long-term skills which will lead to a reduction in the occurrence and recurrence of maltreatment, and associated costs.

**FISCAL IMPACT**

There is no fiscal impact associated with today’s recommendations. The creation of a new Child and Family Well-Being Department and any proposed changes to County of San Diego reorganization may require additional resources with future fiscal impacts. The Health and Human Services Agency will return to the San Diego County Board of Supervisors for consideration and approval of any other future fiscal impacts that may result from recommendations or include in future Operational Plans as needed. At this time, there will be no change in net General Fund cost and no additional staff years.

**BUSINESS IMPACT STATEMENT**

N/A

**ACTION:**

ON MOTION of Supervisor Fletcher, seconded by Supervisor Vargas, the Board of Supervisors took action as recommended.

AYES: Vargas, Anderson, Lawson-Remer, Fletcher, Desmond

State of California)  
County of San Diego) §

I hereby certify that the foregoing is a full, true and correct copy of the Original entered in the Minutes of the Board of Supervisors.

ANDREW POTTER  
Clerk of the Board of Supervisors



**Signed**  
by Andrew Potter