



Foster Care Standards and Oversight Committee

The mission of the Foster Care Standards and Oversight Committee is to provide oversight for and promote communication between the Board of Supervisors, the Department of Social Services and its related agencies, and the community, with emphasis on providing information and recommendations that make the system more effective and efficient.

MINUTES

March 6, 2024

9:00 A.M. – 11:00 A.M.

Meeting held in-person for Committee Members and public.

Virtual option via Microsoft Teams for public only

I. Call to order and introductions.

Rosemary Alanis

- Meeting called to order by Committee Chair, Rosemary Alanis, at 9:08 AM with roll call by DSS Staff Support, Julia Perez.

II. Approve Minutes for February 7, 2023 and March 6, 2024 Agenda.

- Karina Perez (District 1) motioned; Ari Martinez (District 3 BOS Proxy) seconded to approve the February 2024 Minutes and March 2024 Agenda.

III. Updates

A. Receive Report From Department of Social Services Addressing Critical Areas

Kimberli Smith

- Child Welfare Services (CWS) Deputy Director, Kimberli Smith, told the Committee that there have been updates to the staffing information on the CWS Data. Another update that is reflected on the data is the Caseload per Social Worker (Table V footnote).
- Ari mentioned a Child Welfare case that was recently brought up to the Board of Supervisors regarding a child that was violent due to their complex needs. He asked if the CWS Data is separated on whether the child vs adult is inflicting violence. Kimberli said CWS investigates whether the child's guardian is causing the abuse. If it is the child inflicting violence, that is investigated further by Law Enforcement.
- Pam Hancock (District 5) asked what is meant by the "Other/At Risk" category on Table IV. Kimberli said *Sibling At-Risk* would be an example of an *Other/At-risk* allegation.
- Karina asked what does the "Not Recorded" category mean at the top of page 4 on the CWS Data. Kimberli said she will follow up with that.
- Wilma Hashimoto (District 5) asked how many Out of State placements are with their kin. Kimberli said all of them. Due to new changes in the State of California, CWS is no longer able to place children in any type of Short-Term Residential Placements (STRTPs) or group homes.

IV. New Business

A. Resource Family Approval Presentation

Elizabeth Guerrero

- CWS Division Chief, Elizabeth Guerrero gave a Resource Family Approval (RFA) presentation. Topics highlight ongoing RFA work and goals moving forward. *PowerPoint was sent to Committee in advance, available on FCSOC Website and hard copies were provided at the meeting. Below are key points that were discussed from the presentation.*
- In January 2023, the RFA Refinement Workgroup began to reduce RFA backlog of unapproved children placed.
- A lot of work has been done to gather the approval status from homes. In the past, there was lack of data for RFA because RFA data was not being tracked on a database. CWS worked with IT Specialists to create an RFA dashboard with real-time data of caseloads so supervisors and staff could easily access the data in the Child Welfare portal.
- Foster Family Agencies (FFAs) assisted with the RFA backlog by completing written reports and evaluations.
- Ari asked if there is data on the number of homes that were previously approved prior to 2021. Elizabeth said that she will look into that.
- Elizabeth Thomas (District 3) congratulated the RFA department staff for the increased productivity. She asked if the *Let's Talk Newsletter* is going to be distributed to Resource Parents. Elizabeth G. said the Newsletter is distributed on a quarterly basis via mail and Facebook post.
- Ari asked if there is a process taken to track if siblings are separated or kept together. Kimberli said *SafeMeasures* database does track when siblings are placed together and that data is required to be reported on the court reports. Ari suggested this information be included on the CWS Data.

- Elizabeth T. suggested payments to Resource Families should be provided via direct deposit, seeing as paper checks could lead to further delay. CWS Deputy Director, Cathi Huerta, assured Elizabeth T. that the issue is being addressed.
- Vice-Chair Ed Avila asked how many staff members are assigned to investigate and approve resource homes. Kimberli said there are 21 staff members assigned to the Resource Family Approval area of CWS.
- In reference to the pie chart on slide 4, Wilma asked Elizabeth G. if the numbers suggest there are 162 openings to place children. Elizabeth G. responded that not necessarily because some homes may be in inactive status and it also depends how many children resource parents are willing to take in.

Public Comment

- Brian Van Anne (Transition's Children Services) asked if the Foster Family Agency (FFA) families will be invited to attend the *Let's Talk Conference*, seeing as they have always attended in the past. Kimberli said that it depends how much space is available at DSS Hope Plaza.
- Rocky Vang asked for clarification regarding the RFA Backlog disparity between January 2023 to February 2024. Elizabeth G. said the disparity is due to the Department's increased timeliness for approval of Resource Families. Rocky also asked if Resource Family homes are different from Foster homes. Elizabeth G. said foster families are now referred to as Resource Families.
- DSS Social Worker and SEIU Shop Steward, Lorraine Ramirez, added that Resource Families receive payment for becoming caregivers to youth. Receipt of payment takes about 45-days because there are only 2-3 Eligibility Workers working in that area. Due to payment delays, families have reported limited resources to provide care for youth. She asked what the agency is doing to ensure payments are being dispersed to family members to ensure basic needs are met for resource families. Kimberli said once that issue is brought up to the Department, Flexible Family Funding is available so families could purchase any necessities if there is an emergency.
- Lorraine brought up the need to proceed with caution when youth are placed with elderly individuals because some may be prone to increased health risks. She believes DSS should provide extra resources as needed for situations like this.

B. FCSOC Retreat Date Selection

All

- Rosemary requested retreat date availability from the Committee. A poll will be sent out to gather Committee's availability for April 2024.

V. Subcommittee Update

A. Education

Pam Hancock

- Continued work on Foster Literacy NIC. Efforts are being made to continue to improve the school notification process.
- Increased graduation rates within the last 3 years, which is impressive given that this occurred after COVID.

VI. Public Comments

- Patti Scovill said waiting 90 or more days for the approval of resource homes seems too long. She said there is a chance relatives could also be responsible for child abuse, but their motive to become a resource parent is the money aspect of it. She believes unannounced visits are a good idea.
- Elizabeth T. believes unannounced visits implies distrust for the Resource Family. The process to become a Resource Family already requires an extensive process. She added that Resource Families are not mandated to answer the door if an unannounced visit occurs.
- Lorraine knows a lot of efforts are made to keep children with their family as much as possible versus putting them in foster care, but expressed concern that children's safety may not always be prioritized.

VII. Announcements

- Karina provided flyers regarding Fresno Economic Opportunities Commission's (EOC) new program called, "Advancing Fresno County: Guaranteed Income." Guaranteed Income is a program directed towards the Southwest Fresno and Huron areas, since those areas are poverty concentrated. Eligibility for this program includes being 18 years of age, pregnant or having children aged 0-5 and low-income. Application period will be open from March 15th through May 15th.
- Kimberli announced the Fresno Child Abuse Prevention Council will be hosting a breakfast for Child Abuse Prevention on April 9th, 2024 at Chukchansi from 9:00 to 3:00 PM. Tickets are \$65 dollars. The topic of the convening will be about the impact of Substance Abuse Disorder on infants, children, families and our community. Special guests for this event include Dr. Robin Linscheid Janzen, District Attorney Lisa Smittcamp, Police Chief Paco Balderrama, and California Surgeon General, Dr. Diana Ramos.

VIII. Adjourn

- Next meeting will be held Wednesday, April 3, 2024 at 9:00am in-person for Committee members and the public. Virtual option via Microsoft Teams, for members of the public only. Please note: FCSOC meetings require in-person attendance in order to participate. Virtual option is view-only. Meeting adjourned by Rosemary at 10:31 AM.

Committee Attendance

District 1	District 2	District 3	District 4	District 5
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Sal Quintero <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Ari Martinez (Proxy)		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Karina Perez	<input type="checkbox"/> Kevin Lisitsin	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Elizabeth Thomas	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Rosemary Alanis	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Pamela Hancock
Vacant	<input type="checkbox"/> Maisie Young	Vacant	Vacant	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Ed Avila
Vacant	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Tracy Kashian	Vacant	Vacant	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Wilma Hashimoto

* Marked Boxes Indicate Committee Member Attended

Attending Staff and Guests

In Person: Elizabeth Guerrero, Janya Tyler, Michele Daugherty, Cathi Huerta, Kimberli Smith, Julia Perez, Hillary Bolger, J'Lyne Montejano, Taylor Chavez, Brian Van Anne, Amina Flores-Becker, Rocky Vang, Patti Scovill, Lorraine Ramirez, JaLeesah Otero