



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

November 3, 2021

9:00 A.M. – 10:30 A.M.

Meeting held in person at Fresno County Plaza Building (Ballroom)

I. Call to order and introductions:

Meeting called to order by Wilma Hashimoto at 9:05 AM with roll call by staff support.

II. Approve current Meeting Agenda.

III. Approve minutes for August 4, 2021.

Jill Stepke motioned to approve current meeting agenda and minutes for August 4, 2021, Supervisor Sal Quintero second the motion to approve agenda and minutes. Agenda and minutes approved unanimously.

IV. Discuss and Vote on Zoom option for meetings.

- Ari Martinez explained the virtual meeting requirements according to the Brown Act versus AB 361.
- According to AB 361, which is only applicable until January 2024, if the meeting is held solely via zoom or other virtual means, the committee would be required to vote every 30 days whether to continue with virtual or go back to in-person, must allow for public comment and allow an appropriate amount of time for the public to comment.
- According to the Brown Act, if the meeting is held via zoom the location of each member joining must be included on the Agenda at least 72 hours before the meeting so members of the public can potentially join the meeting also.
- If the hybrid route is chosen, in-person with the Zoom option, then the 30 day vote and the location requirement does not apply.
- Wilma put to a vote:
 - Revert meeting frequency back to the first Wednesday of every month; Tracy Kashian motioned and Rich Bailey second the motion, motion approved unanimously.
 - Hold hybrid meetings, in-person with the Zoom option; Jill motioned and Rich second the motion, motion approved unanimously.

V. New Business.

A. Cathi Huerta

- Cathi introduced herself as a concerned member of the community with children grown up and growing up in the community. She shared her experience as Deputy Director of Child Welfare and the outrage of Motel Kids. She explained the creation of the Oversight Committee as a result of the motel kids' situation and how it consisted of concerned community members meeting every week to help better serve the children. Cathi explained she has been selected to review the systemic and bureaucratic issues surrounding the current situation because she has been in the same position, understands the basic system, and can relate to what is happening now. She explained her goal is to give a complete analysis of her findings based on facts and data and provide a recommendation for possible changes.
- In response to Ed Avila's question regarding whether Cathi will have a team assisting her or if she will be doing the review alone, Cathi explained her goal is to have the review be a community effort so her phone number (559-351-3491) will be public so people may reach out to her.
- In response to Elizabeth Thomas' question regarding what some of the things the department came up with as a solution for the children staying in motels instead of in family homes, Cathi explained they took the time to get to know the children, they did a lot of outreach to the Foster Family Agencies (FFAs) and care providers, and offered incentives, some monetary, to get

children placed in family home settings. Cathi prefaced with saying some of the things they came up with 20 years ago are still being enacted today, so it is not to say these are things Fresno County is not doing.

VI. Public Comments:

- Whitney Bunker, Director of City without Orphans. Reminding the committee there are still resources existing in the community not being utilized. She explained churches, non-profits, and community members are willing and able to help, Department of Social Services (DSS) should keep in mind, "it takes a village."
- Joann Pritchard, works for Central California Training Academy. Expressing support for Fresno County and the difficult work being done amid challenges outside the administrations control. Also wanted to mention Central California Training Academy is available for support to assist with growing the workforce. In response to her question regarding whether a formal plan with multiple authors will be done, Cathi explained the goal is to have the review be a collaboration and she will be reaching out. In response to her question about what the Oversight members are doing to ensure the committee's vacancies are filled, Wilma explained they are accepting applications for the vacant seats and encouraged the community members to apply or spread the word to contacts for them to apply as well. Supervisor Quintero also encouraged the community members to apply since there are so many seats currently vacant and provided his cell phone number (559-313-2531), his chief of staff Ari's phone number (559-213-1219), and Rocky from Supervisor Quintero's office (559-345-3871) in case anyone had any questions for them. Pam Hancock recommended the community members continue to attend the meetings, if they do not want to apply, so their voice can still be heard. Ed Avila explained he recently became a member and the online process was simple enough to maneuver so he would recommend people apply because they are needed. Joann also asked, with system of care in mind, what are the plans to open, or keep open, communication between child welfare, probation, and behavioral health to ensure all the needs of the children are being met? Wilma encouraged people from those services to apply to the committee to ensure those areas are represented and can best serve the children of the community.
- Ryan Townsend, Executive Director of Central Valley Justice Coalition. Reminding the department the community wants to help and offered support through his organization in terms of taking legislation to the State, if change in legislation is what is needed to help solve the situation. Ryan asked what the department is doing in the short term, other than the unauthorized shelter, to triage and alleviate the situation or clear some of the bureaucratic red tape preventing the use of the Fresno EOC shelter to house foster youth. Tricia Gonzalez explained the department is looking at all possibilities and being as creative as possible. They did temporarily open a nicer office location for those children who need to come through, but it is not a permanent solution. As far as on a daily basis, the department is paying higher rates, bringing in extra services, and utilizing homes willing to take children outside of their preferred age group. The department is taking advantage of the ability to place children on an emergency basis with relatives or mentors already familiar to the child with a background check and short tour of the grounds. Tricia explained 80% of the Department's placements are emergency placements, so the children are in the office and a resource home needs to be found immediately.
- Supervisor Sal Quintero, Fresno County Board of Supervisors District 3. Inquired on the purpose, timeline, and tour possibilities for the new DSS building in Clovis. Director Delfino Neira explained the construction completion is scheduled for mid-November, the county lease begins when the construction is complete, then the furniture and technology can be installed. Attempts were made to try to occupy the building sooner, however, there are several approvals, such as PG&E and the Fire Marshal, making that difficult to do. Before occupancy but after the fire marshal signs off, some tours may be scheduled. Tricia explained Child Welfare currently occupies 6 different leased buildings. When the opportunity arose to join the Clovis Campus and design a building for the functions Child Welfare has and needs, a subcommittee was created to make those suggestions. Keeping in mind children should not be in the office for more than 24 hours, Tricia shared the new building will have age appropriate game rooms, a quiet room, visitation rooms, shower/bath tub, pantry, and a washer/dryer to be utilized when needed. The approximate date for move in is in April 2022.
- Tiffany Stokes, Probation. Reminding the department of Probation. The county does not do dual jurisdiction so when the children enter Probation they are also supervised and there is still a need to find placement. A lot of STRTPs do not accept probation children and it is even harder to find placement for Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC).
- Mark Allen, retired from Fresno Unified. Recommended a person, or group of people, be assigned to the child(ren) when they enter the system who would be able to assist them in the crisis situation and with their mental health. Tricia shared the department does have a wraparound program with Central Star, who does assign a mental health professional to children who are referred. Elizabeth Thomas explained TBS services through Uplift who have helped children and do follow them through the system and within their situation. She also noted there should be better structural follow up as the children move placements so they are not forgotten about. Explained Rich Bailey has researched and presented data since 2017 of issues identified to the

Board of Supervisors and emphasized the need for the list to be reviewed again. Supervisor Quintero answered the list has been reviewed again and there will be follow up.

- Jason Williams, former social worker. Emphasized the need for a serious discussion between the department and the Board of Supervisors regarding prevention and explained children would not enter the system if social services and the community took better care of the people and families within it.
- Kylene Hashimoto, Chair of Fresno County Behavioral Health Board and a youth advocate. Shared November 17, 2021 is the next Behavioral Health Board meeting and she has invited the director of Department of Behavioral Health (DBH) to speak on how DBH is working with DSS to address the issue of children staying in the offices. Also explained the Behavioral Health Board is looking for more members. The information for the meeting can be found at <https://www.co.fresno.ca.us/departments/behavioral-health/home/for-public/get-involved/healthboard>. She advocated it is easy to point out flaws of the systems but harder to come up with actionable solutions. With regard to the current situation, she asked what the next steps are moving forward, taking into account other partners. Supervisor Quintero stated action is being taken with Cathi and the review, Delfino and the new building, and following up on the notes taken down today. As far as how Behavioral Health can be a partner is through communication. Wilma explained having someone from DBH on the Oversight Committee would be another good way to open the line of communication.
- Elizabeth Thomas, FCSOC member district 3. Explained some inconsistencies she's experienced were a result of the high turnover for social workers. She asked if Social Workers will be a part of the discussion and review into the systemic issues Cathi is looking at in light of the concerns they have expressed. Cathi explained she intends to use the social workers during the review because they are the ones who have the most experience working with the children and within the system. Supervisor Quintero explained the high turnover is partly due to salaries, which is currently being discussed. Elizabeth pointed out the salaries and retirement benefit package need to be seriously looked at for retention because the workforce mindset has changed.
- Richard Bailey, FCSOC member district 4. Expressed his interest to see how the department will address the current situation and the issues brought up.
- Ed Avila, FCSOC member district 5. Asked when the real discussion to the allegations brought up over the last couple of weeks will start. Wilma answered, the first step of the discussion was hearing from the community to begin the collaboration with all of the entities to make changes. Supervisor Quintero elaborated the department must now move forward, identify what needs to be corrected, and begin to come up with solutions.
- Cathi Huerta, retired DSS Director. Expressed the importance of the systemic review and making sure the information is public and transparent.
- Jill Stepke, FCSOC member district 1. Recommended an advocate who stays with the children be trained to do the emotional work social workers and Behavioral Health workers are trained to do.
- Ari Martinez, chief of staff for Supervisor Quintero district 3. Explained the office is always willing to hear from the community and provided the e-mail: District3@fresnocountyca.gov and phone number: 600-3000. Also explained the Board of Supervisors are always accepting application to join a committee. The community is needed to make positive changes.
- Wilma Hashimoto, chair of Foster Care Standards and Oversight Committee District 5. Thanked everyone who attended, provided information for submitting comments via mail or e-mail, and encouraged the community to attend the next meeting being held in person on December 1, with the Zoom option, location to be determined.

VII. Adjourn: 10:38 AM

Rich motioned to adjourn the meeting, Jill second the motion, motion approved unanimously. Meeting adjourned.

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 type="checkbox"/> Vacant	<input type="checkbox"/> Vacant	<input type="checkbox"/> Vacant	<input type="checkbox"/> Vacant	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Pamela Hancock
<input type="checkbox"/> Vacant	<input type="checkbox"/> Vacant	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Elizabeth Thomas	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Richard Bailey	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Ed Avila
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Jill Stepke	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Tracy Kashian	<input type="checkbox"/> Patricia Miller	<input type="checkbox"/> Vacant	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Wilma Hashimoto

Attending Staff and Guests

Dalvin Baker, Rita Bohannon, Shawn Peyvandi, Mary Dolas, Erica Lozano, Daniele Nieto, Justin Johnson, Renee Ramirez, Tricia Gonzalez, Catherine Huerta, Jessica Carrillo, Rocky Vang, Brian Van Anne, Cheri Archuleta, Misty Polin, Maria Padilla, Laura Lopez, Francisco Pelayo, Angi Martinez, Marilyn Bamford, Krystal Rios, Mark Allen, Delfino Niera, Marc Benjamin, Jessica Williams, Ivana Carter, Tolulope Adekunjo, Lyrics Kay, Tiffany Stokes, Lindsay Jones, Jason Williams Lorena Gutierrez, Denise Espinoza, Christy Manning, Kasey Jackson, Chad Valorosi, James Martinez, Ian Coolbear, Cheryl O'Conner, Whitney Bunker, Ryan Townsend, Rebekah Townsend, Jose Vargas, David Tangipa, Kylene Hashimoto, Joann Pritchard.