



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

December 1, 2021

9:00 A.M. – 10:30 A.M.

Meeting held in person at Fresno County Administration Building 2 (Classroom 8)

I. Call to order and introductions.

Meeting called to order by Wilma Hashimoto at 9:10 AM with roll call by staff support.

II. Approve minutes for **November 3, 2021** and the current meeting's agenda.

Rich Bailey motioned to approve current meeting agenda and minutes for November 3, 2021, Elizabeth Thomas second the motion to approve agenda and minutes. Agenda and minutes approved unanimously.

III. Update of the Previous Meeting's New Business.

Pam Hancock questioned whether the committee needed to vote again with regards to holding the meeting in person, via zoom, or a hybrid of the two. Staff support explained they only needed to vote every 30 days if they elected to keep the meeting via Zoom only. Since they elected to have a hybrid of the two, they do not need to vote.

Pam questioned who makes the decision for foster kids to receive the COVID-19 vaccine. Tricia Gonzalez responded the vaccine is considered routine care so the caregiver generally makes the decision, however, since there are strong opinions about the vaccine, if there are concerns or disagreements, a team meeting is held with the family, caregiver, and social worker.

Pam asked about the All County Letter (ACL), ACL 21-146, stating the county may place foster kids out of state from January 2022 through June of 2022 on a case by case basis. Tricia explained that is the case, but there are specific requirements and it is not feasible within the short window. In addition to having to go through the ICPC process, the state has to certify placement, the county must show there are absolutely no placements in CA, there are frequent recertifications, and, as of July 1, 2022, the state cannot recertify any more out of state placements. Meaning, if there is a placement disruption to someone placed out of state, they would immediately have to come back to California.

IV. Department of Social Services Update: **Tricia Gonzalez.**

Tricia shared the department lost 76 social workers and only hired 64 social workers in 2021, in comparison to losing 53 social workers and hiring 58 social workers in 2020. There was a recruitment for Social Worker and Social Worker Practitioner so the department is waiting for that list. There was one last hiring off of the old list, 11 people were invited to the interviews, only 9 showed up and they were recommended, still waiting to see how many accept. 200 people took the social work test, of that the department is looking to hire 45 social workers. The department is also looking to hire 50 extra help, 25 to adult services and 25 to child welfare. As far as the social work practitioners, there was only one day of interviews based on the number of applicants but a continuous recruitment was opened.

Negotiations are still happening with the union for all classifications right now.

There are approximately 2700 court cases and about 2000 kids in out of home placement.

Tricia gave an update on the UMC space being used for children waiting for placement. She explained it is an office without workers work stations so when the kids are acting up, they are not able to cause disruption. It is designed for them to only be there for 24 hours. The workers are taking new kids and the kids who have disrupted placement there and the department has focused most of the staff who were watching the kids in the various buildings, to UMC. The department is still looking at other options such as opening a shelter, which would mean taking the more difficult kids and separating them out from those with a shorter transition.

The former Costco building off of Villa in Clovis is Building 5, the child welfare building. It will be similar in layout to building 2, in terms of finishes and furniture; it has an area with 3 separate rooms, one for younger kids, one for older kids, and one that will be a quiet room for those who want to rest or sleep. There will be a shower for those who came in from runaway, for example, and there will be

a pantry. The building is still an office so the department is trying to think of alternative locations.

Patricia Miller asked if the department has considered reopening group homes to help with transitional placement and the issue of having children in the offices. Tricia explained the Continuum of Care Reform the State implemented caused the group homes to have to transition to short term residential therapeutic placement (STRTP) which increased requirements and many of them decided it would be too difficult. Working with the association with the state, there is a recommendation to look at alternatives giving the counties more flexibility, such as a tiered system, for example.

Patricia inquired on whether the county's pay scale and benefit package have been reviewed in an attempt to attract or keep social workers. Tricia shared the union negotiations with the county is currently at that stage and the department does not have any control over it. The discussions are between the union and the Board of Supervisors, however, the struggles with obtaining and retaining staff are shared with the board.

Cathi Huerta asked why the decision was made to put all children – high needs, hard to place, dangerous behaviors – together at Mod C (UMC) and expressed concern over having all of those children mixed together in one place. Tricia explained, the CAO assured the public that children will no longer be brought into the child welfare offices. Cathi suggested the direction from the CAO be revisited because there are still children at Mod C staying for an extended period of time and the safety of the children is concerning.

Sonia De La Rosa asked via Zoom chat box for clarification of the direction from the CAO as far as the children no longer being brought into the office. Tricia explained during the news coverage, the CAO, very publicly and clearly, stated the department would no longer have kids in the building. Since that statement, the department has not had children in the offices.

Patricia asked who the CAO is and Tricia explained Jean Rousseau is the current CAO but is retiring, so as of December 6, 2021 the new CAO is Paul Nerland and he is aware of the issues and the struggles.

Patricia asked if the committee can have a tour of the new facility, or any facility the children are being held, and recommended the tour happens regularly so they are not caught off guard again. Tricia agreed the tours can be accommodated but, due to safety, they may have to happen in waves, so only a few committee members at a time.

Brian Van Anne commended the creation of the 3 rooms separated by age group at the new Building 5, but suggested, as a short term solution until the building is completed, using the STRTPs as the group homes for the older, harder to place children in the meantime. He acknowledged the struggles such as cost and lack of support from the state, but asked why not take the risk. Tricia explained the STRTPs are already heavily used right now, including STRTP of One, meaning the county meets the needs for one youth and pays for all of that. If there was an STRTP willing to be an emergency, no eject, take all kids needed, the department would absolutely use them and pay for all the beds to be utilized, but there isn't one. The state went from 9000 beds to 5000 beds since 2017, with Families First Prevention Services Act part 4 requiring every placement to have to have a qualified individual assessment is depleting those options. The STRTP has to be accredited to get the federal funding, if the therapist does not agree the youth needs that level of care the county will lose the funding and will have to move the youth. The state is against shelters, at first they responded with a hard no, but they are now open to working with the county and making the shelter a possibility. Most counties without a shelter are asking to do so as well. The intention is not to outright push back, but to get to a place where the department can present what is needed, why it is needed, and hopefully get traction to move forward.

Richard Bailey commented the committee is present to support the social workers, identify issues, and have public conversations to create solutions and actionable items. The conversations he hoped were happening with Tricia and Cathi should be continuous and used during the committee meetings to address the specific problems on the record, formally and in a more rapid way. He pointed out the committee should be doing useful things, such as problem solving, and if those tasks cannot be done, then the committee should disband. Richard identified items needing to be addressed on the list he presented to the Board of Supervisors in 2017 as continuous issues (i.e. social worker turnover, quality of training, development, visit social work areas announced and unannounced). The list identified in 2017 is evidence the committee is trying to be useful. When it comes to the Board of Supervisors, Supervisor Quintero was at the last meeting (November 3, 2021) and Richard was expecting him back again, but he is concerned with keeping their attention or whether they have moved on from the topic.

Jill Stepke clarified Ari Martinez and Rocky Vang are from Supervisor Quintero's office and Sonia De La Rosa is from the CAO's office.

Sonia De La Rosa reached out to and clarified the direction from the CAO as far as having children in the office. Incoming CAO Paul Nerland's direction is to have the children placed in the safest and secure location. Cathi's concerns regarding all children in one building, including the children with behavioral problems, is also a concern of the CAO, he is being informed of the issues and wants to ensure what is needed for the children will be implemented.

Ari Martinez confirmed Supervisor Quintero is still keeping an eye on the issues and he is reporting back to him directly the concerns of the committee. Ari encouraged the committee members continuously reach out to their board member and apprise them of the issues and concerns brought up during the meetings.

Jill clarified the concern regarding the possible danger of high needs children sharing space with all children waiting for placement has been addressed and a new process of taking the difficult to place children to another office is possible according to the CAO. Tricia confirmed but explained putting the new solution into effect will take time due to staffing issues as she will need to staff the offices taking these children.

Patricia expressed her concern the State does not understand the gravity of the struggles with placement and reunification. Wilma acknowledged Patricia's concerns and explained her experience is exactly why foster parents are needed on the committee.

Pam questioned where the committee should begin if the issues are with the state and getting them to understand their regulations are hindering the necessary work to be done for the safety and well-being of the children. Tricia explained the voices need to come from everywhere, the county has been advocating to the state but their response has been to work harder and work smarter. Because of the current moment and public concern, the issues are now being heard. Legislatively the department has been speaking with some of the elected officials about some changes and things they may need to help with.

Patricia asked why kinship families have priority over foster families, as far as being approved for placement. Due to time, Wilma requested the topic of placement approval be added to the agenda for the next meeting.

V. New Business.

Wilma requested legislative updates at the next meeting and information regarding the FFAs and their capacities.

The committee asked Cathi for an update on some of her findings since she has been in contact with the social workers. Cathi reported she has found workers are willing to do the necessary work and be part of the solution, the social workers feel frustrated, overwhelmed, and worried about the children. Cathi brought up an issue with foster families not answering the phone at night when placement is needed. Jill asked Cathi to report her findings each month and Cathi agreed.

Brian clarified his agency, Transitions Children's Services, does answer the phone every time they are called, however, they are currently experiencing staffing issues because they are losing workers to the school districts.

VI. Review of Action Items.

None.

VII. Subcommittee Updates.

A. Education/FCSS

Pam shared Fresno County Superintendent of Schools advisory meeting is hosting a focus group on Monday, December 6, 2021 from 2pm until 3:30pm.

B. Children's Mental Health

None.

VIII. Round Table Discussion.

Held during DSS update.

IX. Public Comments.

Held during DSS update.

X. Adjourn.

Rich motioned to adjourn meeting. Pam second the motion. Meeting adjourned by Wilma at 10:45 AM.

Committee Attendance

District 1	District 2	District 3	District 4	District 5
		<input type="checkbox"/> Sal Quintero <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Ari Martinez (Proxy)		
<input type="checkbox"/> Vacant	<input type="checkbox"/> Vacant	<input type="checkbox"/> Vacant	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Rosemary Alanis	<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 (via Zoom)
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Jill Stepke	<input type="checkbox"/> Tracy Kashian	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Patricia Miller	<input type="checkbox"/> Vacant	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Wilma Hashimoto

Attending Staff and Guests

In Person: Tricia Gonzalez, Erica Lozano, Susana Morales, Cheri Archuleta, Renee Ramirez, Dalvin Baker, Joanna Litchenberg, Brian Van Anne, Marilyn Bamford, Krystal Rios, Chad Valarosi, Jenessa Hetter, Rebekah Rodriguez, Kathleen Hernandez

Via Zoom: Ari Martinez, Rocky Vang, Sonia De La Rosa, Rita Bohannon, Jessica Carrillo, Shawn Peyvandi, Catherine Huerta, Bernia Walker, Angela Smith, Karel Gonzalez, Jessica Morgan, Jason Williams, Cherie Morales, *Galaxy A32 5G (unknown name)*, *Bright Futures (unknown name)*.