



COUNTY OF YOLO

Office of the County Administrator

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To: The Honorable Daniel M. Wolk
Superior Court of California, County of Yolo
1000 Main Street
Woodland, CA 95695

September 12, 2023

To: Yolo County Grand Jury
P.O. Box 2142
Woodland, CA 95776

via e-mail: grandjury@yolocounty.org

RE: 2022-2023 Yolo County Grand Jury Report: Keeping Families Together,
Strengthening a Struggling Child Welfare Service

Honorable Daniel M. Wolk:

The following is the response from the Yolo County Board of Supervisors to the findings and recommendations in the 2022-2023 Yolo County Grand Jury Report titled, "2022-2023 Yolo County Grand Jury Report: Keeping Families Together, Strengthening a Struggling Child Welfare Service." The response from the Health and Human Services Agency is attached.

F-1: Child Welfare Services is facing an acute shortage of social workers, hampering the delivery of needed services to Yolo County's children and families. This is an ongoing problem dating back at least eight years.

Response: The respondent partially agrees with the finding and is supportive of the Health and Human Services Agency's efforts.

Health and Human Services Agency response under separate cover:

We partially disagree with this Finding. While the Agency has experienced significant challenges with recruitment, hiring, and retention over the past four years, the reduction in workforce has been accompanied by a dramatic decrease in the number of cases for which the Agency is responsible. Between March 2020 and June 2023, total child welfare cases in Yolo County have decreased by 45.7% (658 to 357), and the number of children in foster care decreased 42.8% (478 to 273). Over the past few months, we have onboarded twelve (12) child welfare staff that include two (2) Child Welfare Workers, nine (9) Social Worker

Practitioners, and one (1) Social Worker Supervisor. Four days prior to the release of the Grand Jury’s report (June 23, 2023), an analysis was conducted and determined the median (18), mean (17.8) and range (5-25) of caseloads in the Family Maintenance, Family Reunification, and Permanent Planning programs.

F-5: Despite the critical need for additional social workers, professional resources dedicated to recruitment are lacking.

Response: The respondent partially disagrees with the finding. Recent efforts by the staff to improve recruiting have seen some success. The Board of Supervisors supports these continuing efforts.

Health and Human Services Agency response under separate cover:

We partially disagree with this Finding. We acknowledge that professional resources in the form of recruiters may have been helpful during the staffing “crisis,” and could be of benefit in the future. We also acknowledge that county and department human resource recruiting tools and resources could be helpful. We struggle to use modern recruitment posting methods, recruiting staff at the intern and college graduate level, and finding creative ways to create talent pipelines for our social working staff in an ever more competitive hiring environment.

We believe that we have experienced some success using informal methods (that included having child welfare leadership actively contact social worker programs of regional universities to make direct contact with current and graduating student classes), and again will note that there is no longer a “critical need for additional social workers.” We also continue to work with our partners in both department and county HR to enhance recruiting tools and resources.

F-6: Black children in Yolo County have a continuing history of entering foster care at higher rates than other ethnic and racial groups, which is potentially avoidable.

Response: The respondent agrees with the finding.

Health and Human Services Agency response under separate cover:

We agree with this Finding. The fact that Black children have historically been overrepresented in Yolo County’s child welfare system cannot be disputed. In calendar year 2012, the odds of Black children in Yolo County entering foster care were almost double that for White children. Over the next ten years, this rate

increased dramatically, culminating in 2021, where Black children in Yolo County were 16.54 times more likely than White children to enter foster care. Yolo County recognizes that this is a social justice issue and is committed to providing prevention and early intervention through an Alternative Response (AR) program that targets Black children ages 0-5 in Yolo County, as this demographic has been identified as being the most likely to enter foster care in Yolo County. The AR program was identified in Yolo County's most recent System Improvement Plan (SIP) and will be a collaboration between Yolo County Child Welfare Services, Yolo County First Five, and Yolo County Children's Alliance to provide preventative services using evidence-based interventions that have been demonstrated to have increased success with Black families.³

(³ While the Alternative Response program will provide preventative services to any family that meets criteria under the Families First Prevention Services Act – regardless of demographic – the specific evidence-based practices were selected because they have demonstrated success with Black families. The rationale for this decision is discussed in Yolo County's Comprehensive Prevention Plan (CPP) document that is currently being reviewed by the State and will be available for review upon approval.)

- F-7: Yolo County has a long-term, crucial shortage of foster families, especially for Black and Latino children. As a result, children are placed out-of-county, disrupting their school and community relationships and making family visitation more difficult. Additionally, out-of-county placements are more time consuming for social workers, adding to their already over-burdened workload.**

Response: The respondent agrees with the finding and supports the efforts of the Health and Human Services Agency.

Health and Human Services Agency response under separate cover:

We agree with this Finding. Yolo County recognizes that this is a significant problem and has identified the recruitment of foster families in Yolo County as a priority in the most recent System Improvement Plan (SIP). The County has contracted with an organization with specific expertise in recruiting foster parents, Raise A Child, and is actively making efforts to address the shortage of local foster homes. It should be noted that, as of August 1, 2023, approximately 75% (175/235) of Yolo County foster children are placed in Yolo or the nearby counties of Sacramento, Solano, Colusa, Sutter, Yuba, and Butte.

- F-8: Community resources for child abuse prevention and intervention services essential to family preservation are inadequate, especially for a racially and culturally diverse client base.**

Response: The respondent partially agrees with the finding.

Health and Human Services Agency response under separate cover:

We partially disagree with this Finding. While the county has many resources to address child abuse prevention and intervention services there is always room for improvement, particularly in providing services that are racially and culturally tailored to meet the needs of marginalized children and families in our community. This is a key priority for the agency to address and while the agency doesn't directly control what resources are and are not in the community it is an area of active focus.

R-3: Yolo County Board of Supervisors should, subject to collective bargaining, adopt a compensation and benefit structure for all social worker classifications that is competitive in the regional market by July 1, 2024.

Response: The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted. In Fiscal Year 2022-2023 the Yolo County Board of Supervisors changed the County's compensation philosophy to compensate employees at 100% of the market average. For employees in bargaining units who have not had a compensation survey completed in 2022 the County increased salaries by 5%. The 5% increase is an approximate value to increase salaries to 100% of the market average until a compensation survey is completed during the next round of bargaining.

Health and Human Services Agency response under separate cover:

We partially agree. The county has recently moved its's compensation model to 100% of area compensation average. In January 2023 several HHSA classifications, including some in CWS and social workers received increases due to this compensation methodology change. HHSA is also working on a standalone Child Welfare Social Worker series which will include enhanced salaries for purposes of adequate compensation, recruitment and retention. We believe, in some part salaries have contributed to some vacancy issues. There is also a shortage of social workers across the State of California. This work should be completed by July of 2024.

Benefit structure is a little more difficult to implement from the department alone and will have to be addressed through the collective bargaining process with the county negotiating team and various bargaining units as contracts come up for renewal.