



PATRICIA S. PLOEHN, LCSW
Director

County of Los Angeles DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES

425 Shatto Place, Los Angeles, California 90020
(213) 351-5602

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Contact: Louise Grasmehr or Stu Riskin
DCFS Office of Public Affairs
(213) 351-5886

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PRESS RELEASE

Los Angeles County Embarks on Massive Child Welfare Reform Plan ***Department of Children and Family Services Leads Nation in Use of*** ***Flexible Funding to Protect Children, Help Families***

The Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS), the largest child welfare agency in the country, has begun a historic child welfare reform plan that will focus on preventative services to help families and keep children out of the foster care system. The plan will also broaden the search for more permanent homes for children already in the system and build on the department's core mandate of ensuring all children can grow up in safe, loving and permanent families.

Dubbed the "Title IV-E Waiver Demonstration Project," the five-year plan was approved by the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors and subsequently accepted by the California Department of Social Services. The plan provides for the flexible use of funding for Los Angeles County to further develop proactive up-front preventative services for children and families to prevent children from entering the foster care system. The waiver will also provide the ability to use funding for additional intensive services to support more timely reunifications with family or alternate permanent plans of adoption or legal guardianship for children currently in foster care.

Historically, Los Angeles County has been limited by strict federal funding guidelines to only spend its money on children in out-of-home care rather than having the ability to spend money on keeping children safely in their own homes and communities. This resulted in an over-reliance on removing children from their home to ensure their safety.

Under the waiver, DCFS will be able use the IV-E funds to ensure the safety and well-being of all children, whether or not the child is removed from the home. In addition, the waiver will allow for flexibility to use the funds to provide direct services not currently funded by IV-E based on each family's individual needs to ensure that children remain safely in their family of origin, are reunified sooner, or an alternative permanency plan is achieved timely. Flexible IV-E funding is expected to result in a shift in thinking and practices away from removal from the home as the safest and best alternative for children. With additional community based resources available with this flexible funding, more children will be able to stay safe in their own homes and, for those who cannot, a new family through adoption or legal guardianship will be available.

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"To Enrich Lives Through Effective and Caring Service"

Using a very comprehensive and inclusive planning process, over 200 strategies and ideas of how and where to best start on using the funding were discussed and debated. Based on best practice research and extensive feedback, it was decided to start with eight major areas of focus.

The eight areas include:

- Implementation of a Countywide Prevention Initiative focusing on locally based prevention services and supports;
- Expansion of Family Team Decision-Making;
- Expansion of Family Finding, including expanding the use of technology such as U.S. Search to find family members;
- Establishment of up-front mental health, domestic violence and substance abuse assessment system;
- Expansion of Family Preservation Services;
- Recruitment, development and use of community-based placements;
- Enhancement of parent-child visitation, including plans to bring in more staff to serve as trained monitors to assist social workers with visits; and
- Use of aftercare support services.

The first sequence of the waiver project, includes:

- Expanding Family Team Decision-Making with initial attention on children in group homes;
- Contracting with agencies to conduct up-front assessments to identify domestic violence, substance abuse and mental health issues; and
- Expanding Family Finding to two additional offices;

More information about the Title IV-E Waiver Demonstration Project can be found on the DCFS website at www.lacdcfs.org.

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