

# WE'RE IN THE **WAIVER** NOW!

## Los Angeles County's Massive Child Welfare Reform Plan Kicks Off on July 1<sup>st</sup>

***The Departments of Children and Family Services and Probation  
Will Lead the Nation on Use of Flexible Funding to Protect Children, Help Families***

### **Remind me again, what exactly is the "Waiver"?**

DCFS annually receives a certain amount of Title IV-E Federal funding to provide room and board, and services to children while they are in the foster care system. Problem is, that this money can only be used while children are removed from their homes and not on services to keep children in their homes. To address this dilemma, the State of California proposed that the Federal government *waive*, or put aside, certain Title IV-E funding requirements for five years for California counties that elect to participate in what is formally known as the "Title IV-E Waiver Capped Allocation Demonstration Project" (Waiver).

As you may recall, our County's Waiver request was submitted to the State in February 2004, then by the State to the federal government in May 2004. The federal government approved California's request in April 2006. Since that time, DCFS and Probation, with government and community stakeholder support and input, have been working on a plan so the Waiver can be implemented on July 1, 2007. The Waiver means that ***participating counties can re-invest federal funding to provide services to children without having to remove them from their homes.***

While the Waiver is not new or additional funding, it will allow for flexibility to re-invest IV-E funds to provide direct services based on each family's individual needs so that children can remain safely with their families, are reunified sooner, or that an alternative permanency plan is achieved timely. The Waiver is expected to result in a shift in thinking and practice away from removal from the home as the safest and best alternative for children.

In California, Child Welfare and Probation Systems in Los Angeles and Alameda County have elected to participate in this new and innovative pilot project.

### **Why is the Waiver such a big deal?**

A child's need for a permanent family must be as vital and innate to our practice as the need for safety yet *there are still too many children who have spent too many years in foster care.* The Waiver is important because we'll be able to focus our efforts on the activities and services that will promote the following essential outcomes ("The Big Three") to improve the lives of children and families:

- Children will stay at home whenever possible,
- Children will be safe within their families, and
- Children will not grow up in foster care.

### **Why now and why the Waiver?**

The strict federal funding guidelines restricts spending to children in out-of-home care, limits our ability to spend on keeping children safely in their own homes and communities, and has resulted in an over-reliance on removing children from their homes to ensure their safety.

As you know, over the past few years, DCFS has made tremendous efforts in reducing the number of children in foster care. Our success in keeping children with their families, reunifying those in out-of-home care more quickly, or moving them to permanency through adoption or guardianship, has resulted in fewer children in out-of-home care and, therefore, *less Title IV-E funding.* ***Basically, the***

***better we do at keeping and returning children home, the less funding we receive! DCFS leadership realized that this doesn't make sense and worked with the State and Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors to apply for the Waiver.***

### **What does the Waiver mean for the next five years?**

The State and the federal government will give Los Angeles and Alameda Counties the average annual amount of funding they received during some previous years when the foster care census was higher. Los Angeles County will receive the same "averaged" amount of annual funding as a capped allocation for the next five years.

***If we have fewer children in placement, we will be spending less on foster care and will have more funds to re-invest flexibly on other efforts to improve outcomes for children and families.***

### **What will the Waiver focus on?**

DCFS and stakeholders identified eight priorities that could improve outcomes for children and families. The first sequence of the Waiver, beginning July 1, will begin or enhance the first three:

- **Expansion of Family Team Decision-Making (FTDM) Conferences to Focus on Permanency;**
- **Upfront Assessments for Mental Health, Substance Abuse and Domestic Violence for High Risk Cases, with Expanded Family Preservation Slots Starting at the Compton Office; and**
- **Expansion of Family Finding and Engagement through Specialized Permanency Units Starting in Three Offices - Metro North, Lakewood and Pomona.**

Additionally DCFS has already begun to implement a new countywide **Prevention Initiative focusing on locally based networks of prevention services and supports.** As we evaluate our progress, the following priorities will be considered for inclusion in the next sequences of the Waiver implementation, over the next four years:

- **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.**

### **How will the Waiver's results be evaluated?**

This summer a State evaluator will conduct staff surveys and focus groups to measure changes to our service delivery system under the Waiver. As the IV-E Waiver Demonstration Project moves forward, each initiative will be regularly evaluated and findings will be included in the implementation plan. Regular updates on the progress of the IV-E Waiver Demonstration Project will be provided to staff and stakeholders.

### **What does this mean to you, as a DCFS employee?**

You will be part of a leading national organization that is on the cutting-edge of child welfare reform. You may be contacted as part of the ongoing evaluation so stay tuned!

**For more info, contact L. A. County's Waiver Demonstration Project Coordinators:**  
[waiverinfo@dcs.lacounty.gov](mailto:waiverinfo@dcs.lacounty.gov) and [waiverinfo@probation.lacounty.gov](mailto:waiverinfo@probation.lacounty.gov)