

COUNTY OF EL DORADO

HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES

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May 13, 2014

The Honorable Shirley Weber, Chair
Assembly Budget Subcommittee #1

Honorable Members
Assembly Budget Subcommittee #1
State Capitol Building, Room 6026
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Services to Child Victims of Commercial Sexual Exploitation

Dear Chair Weber and Members:

El Dorado County Health & Human Services Agency (HHSA) urges your support to provide \$20.3 million of General Funds in fiscal year 2014-15 to protect and serve child victims of commercial sexual exploitation through California's child welfare services system. Commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC) is an emerging national and statewide epidemic that deserves our highest attention. State support is needed to build capacity in child welfare agencies to effectively meet the needs of this unique population.

While our county child welfare agency has made strides to serve this population, commercially sexually exploited children (CSEC) have suffered extensive abuse and trauma that has clearly overwhelmed our social workers and limited service providers. The following will illustrate the impact that human trafficking is having on Child Welfare Services (CWS) in our county and what our agency is doing to combat this growing epidemic.

Since 2010, El Dorado County has had nineteen (19) foster and probation youth who have been identified as victims of sexual exploitation. The last sixteen (16) cases involving foster youth who have been identified as Human Trafficking victims occurred within this past year, and these children required specialized social workers, services, and placements.

In 2013, HHSA-CWS formed our Foster Youth and Human Trafficking Task Force (FYHT), which is comprised of local representatives from our Sheriff's Department, City Law Enforcement Agencies, County Probation, District Attorney's Office, Mental Health, Public Health, County Counsel, County Department of Education and chaired by HHSA Senior Management with three social workers who

have been trained in this subject matter. We have educated our local Juvenile Court Judges and community stakeholders, and we have created specialized Juvenile Dependency 300 CSEC Warrants that are given priority status for those foster youth who have been identified as high risk and are on runaway status.

The FYHT Task Force has implemented the use of the California Department of Justice (DOJ), Missing Persons Form (CJIS 8568), used by law enforcement for entry into DOJ's Missing and Unidentified Persons System (MUPS), which goes out nationwide whenever a foster youth has been reported missing. Additionally, we have created a specialized CWS/CSEC Be-on-the-Lookout or "BOLO" that is simultaneously disseminated to all area law enforcement agencies upon the execution of the CSEC custody warrant. This BOLO identifies the high risk foster youth and who at HHSA to contact when the youth has been located. In several recent instances, with these two alerts in hand, the law enforcement officer was better informed and took greater care to interview all parties associated with the youth at the time of contact. These contacts often involved adult subjects who were found on scene with the foster child, and this information provided law enforcement with more latitude in dealing with these adult subjects. This process has shifted and changed the conversation between law enforcement and child welfare from treating these youth as '*criminals*' and instead viewing them as the '*victims*' that they are.

In conjunction with the above tools, HHSA-CWS enters into the Child Welfare Services/Case Management System a specialized warning that alerts child welfare agencies throughout California that a CSEC 300 warrant has been issued, the need for an initial hospital examination prior to any placement, advises who exactly to contact at HHSA, and a specific notation not to place this youth at a lower level of care, pending contact with our agency.

Prior to and following the location of the CSEC foster youth who is on the run, the FYHT Task Force coordinates a case management plan, which is designed to address unknown related traumatic experiences that will need to be addressed at the time the youth has been located, to include determining the appropriate level of placement. Both pre and post event case management programs require ongoing specialized training, recruitment of services and placement providers -with no additional funding available to offset the fiscal implications for child welfare agencies. While foster youth continue to be exploited by pimps/traffickers, and regardless of the current funding issues, no one who is entrusted in the care, custody and control of these youth can turn our backs on their silent cries for help.

Absent these types of task forces - and compounded with inadequate funding to train social workers, service providers, and develop specialized foster placements - the commercial sexual exploitation of children will continue, and this serves to reinforce the point to those pimps/traffickers that they are free to move about our society and continue to exploit our foster youth. The commercial sexual exploitation of children is a critically important problem in California that requires a comprehensive solution. This includes the need for education of our communities, our foster youth and training for foster care providers to identify and prevent exploitation. Children in foster care may be particularly vulnerable to victimization due to their history of trauma and for this reason, so it is important that all social work staff receive training on identification of CSEC and appropriate case management services must be implemented.

In addition, due to the extensive trauma and violence experienced by CSEC victims, services must be tailored to meet their individual needs, working collaboratively with other systems - including domestic violence providers, mental health, law enforcement, public health, district attorney's and others - to leverage resources. This CSEC epidemic can be seen throughout California, and for this reason, all counties will need training and support to coordinate with other systems to leverage these

resources. In addition, this proposal would provide for specialized staff in the large, urban counties where the incidence of CSEC is higher.

All counties currently lack capacity to provide enhanced supervision and support to protect CSEC victims through the regular foster care programs. This proposal would address this concern making available additional supports to CSEC victims, including immediate needs for a safe shelter, clothing and long-term services so that CSEC victims can achieve positive outcomes of permanency and well-being.

We thank you for your attention to this important matter on behalf of child victims of commercial sexual exploitation.

Sincerely,

Don Ashton, M.P.A.
Director
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Enclosures: Missing Persons Form CJIS 8568
Child Welfare Services FYHT Bulletin

cc: County Welfare Directors Association of California (CWDA)