



# County of Orange

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County Executive Office

August 25, 2015

Honorable Glenda Sanders  
Presiding Judge of the Superior Court of California  
700 Civic Center Drive West  
Santa Ana, CA 92701

Subject: Response to Grand Jury Report, "Child Abuse Hotline: Unanswered Cries for Help"

Dear Judge Sanders:

Per your request, and in accordance with Penal Code 933, please find the County of Orange response to the subject report as approved by the Board of Supervisors. The respondents are the Orange County Board of Supervisors and Social Services Agency.

If you have any questions, please contact Jessica O'Hare of the County Executive Office at 714-834-7250.

Sincerely,

Frank Kim  
County Executive Officer

Enclosure

cc: FY 2014-15 Orange County Grand Jury Foreman  
Mark Denny, Chief Operating Officer, County Executive Office  
Jessica O'Hare, Assistant to the COO, County Executive Office  
Mike Ryan, Social Services Agency



**Responses to Findings and Recommendations  
2014-15 Grand Jury Report:  
“Child Abuse Hotline: Unanswered Cries for Help”**

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**SUMMARY RESPONSE STATEMENT:**

On June 10, 2015, the Orange County Grand Jury released a report entitled: “Child Abuse Hotline: Unanswered Cries for Help.” The report directed responses the Board of Supervisors and to the Social Services Agency. This is a combined response to the Grand Jury’s findings and recommendations.

**FINDINGS AND RESPONSES:**

**F.1.            Since 2012, the percentage of dropped calls has increased significantly to an unacceptable level.**

**Response:**    Disagrees partially with the finding.

Yes, the percentage of dropped call rates increased dating back to 2012. New strategies were implemented and the percentage of dropped calls for the Child Abuse Registry (CAR) in the past four months has been under 4%, indicating a significant reduction. The exact percentages of dropped calls since March 2015 were as follows:

Month	% Dropped Calls
March 2015	3.40 %
April 2015	2.72 %
May 2015	3.22 %
June 2015	2.49 %

**F.2.            Significant improvement in dropped call rates is a reasonable expectation because during the last three years, there have been months when the Child Abuse Registry achieved dropped call rates in the range of 5%-7%.**

**Response:**    Agrees with the finding.

**F.3. The new requirement to document all Information-Only calls from mandated reporters contributed to increased waiting time on Child Abuse Registry calls because most social workers do not answer waiting calls while doing the additional documentation.**

**Response:** Agrees with the finding.

**F.4. The volume of child abuse calls coming into the Child Abuse Registry has significantly increased, which necessitates changing management strategies for dealing with the increased amount and complexity of the activity.**

**Response:** Agrees with the finding.

In 2013, 37,904 calls were received by the Social Services Agency (SSA) Child Abuse Registry. In 2014, 42,670 calls were received, representing a 12.57 % increase. There has also been a significant increase in calls resulting in child abuse reports (16%) over the past year.

While SSA agrees with the finding, it is important to further explain the complexity of the Hotline which was understated in the Grand Jury Report. Out of an abundance of caution, due to the nature of the business and its impact on the lives of those in our community, Hotline workers spend considerable time assessing and evaluating the details provided by the caller. Using the Structured Decision Making assessment tool, Hotline workers determine the appropriate response to the calls, which are categorized as follows:

- Accept for investigation as an immediate response
- Accept for investigation as a 10 day response
- Evaluate Out (E/O) with no referral to another community agency
- E/O with referral to an appropriate community agency
- Information Only (I/O) as determined by CFS policy

Calls are determined to be Information Only (I/O) reports when the information provided by the reporting party does not meet the legal definition of child abuse or neglect. I/O reports from mandated reporters are entered into the California State Child Welfare Services/Case Management System (CWS/CMS) for documentation purposes. State Division 31 Regulations require social workers to use a standard Immediate Field Response Protocol during the call screening process for all incoming calls before reaching a referral disposition. Calls that eventually result in I/O reports undergo the same screening process as those that result in 10-Day or Immediate Responses. The length of time it takes for social workers to document all calls, including I/O calls, is contingent on the complexity of the calls.



The CAR and APS Registries utilize a triage system while screening incoming calls to determine the level of urgency. The “triage” system includes consultation between hotline social workers, message takers and supervisors. These consultations are critical in producing reliable and responsive dispositions. Consultation occurs on approximately 75% of all calls.

**F.5. The Adult Protective Services hotline was absorbed into the Child Abuse Registry. Most social workers interviewed reported that they felt competent and enjoyed taking the calls for the agency from which they came (child or adult), but still felt unsure, slower, and less confident taking calls for the other agency.**

**Response:** Agrees with the finding.

Although staff has received initial, extensive cross training, the CAR and Adult Protective Services (APS) hotline assignments are very complex. As a result, social workers continue to be assessed regarding their competency levels to perform both APS and CAR functions on a regular basis. On July 7, 2015, the CAR manager completed a survey with 30 hotline social workers. The social workers surveyed reported that they feel competent to perform the work functions of both APS and CAR. Ongoing training and support will be provided to any additional new staff and current staff, as needed and determined appropriate.

**F.6. Hotline social workers are required to input the same repeated data on multiple forms for the same call. Manual data entry is duplicated, which requires additional time away from being available to take waiting calls.**

**Response:** Agrees with the finding.

**F.7. CAR management does not appear to have specific policies or strategies for dealing with peak periods when there are long wait times and high dropped call rates.**

**Response:** Disagrees wholly with the finding.

SSA management recognizes the concerning rate of dropped calls during peak times and has been analyzing data and trends to reduce that number. Specific policies and strategies are in place to deal with peak periods to address dropped call rates during long wait times. In addition, SSA regularly consults with other county Child Abuse Registries to identify ways in which to address this serious issue.

Many of these strategies were implemented prior to and during the Grand Jury investigation. In addition, SSA continues to evaluate and implement new strategies as appropriate.

Measures taken to reduce the dropped call rate during peak times include merging the CAR and APS Registries to increase agency capacity and efficiency, training all social workers to both take and screen CAR and APS hotline calls, implementing a call message-taking system to ensure that a caller can leave a message and receive a return call promptly, reducing data entry requirements by eliminating the need for social workers to summarize prior CAR reports, implementing a protocol indicating how/when hotline supervisors will serve as back-ups to screen calls during peak volume times, assessing and adjusting staffing times to manage the workload/call volume, and continuing to make CAR dropped calls a priority at all levels of management by making it a standing item on meeting agendas. In addition, SSA reallocated staff and received approval from the Board of Supervisors for new positions in order to increase staffing at CAR.

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS AND RESPONSES:**

**R.1. The Child Abuse Registry should examine the feasibility of utilizing an abbreviated report for mandated Information-Only calls to expedite completion of these reports, thus freeing up the hotline worker to take waiting calls. (F.3.)**

**Response:** The recommendation has not been implemented, but will be implemented in the future.

CAR management will convene a workgroup with CAR staff to examine the feasibility of using an abbreviated report for mandated Information Only calls. The group is scheduled to meet in this summer and will have recommendations completed by October 2015.

**R2. Additional training of all Child Abuse Registry social workers should continue until all workers feel equally competent taking both adult and child calls. While training is disruptive and time consuming, the formal training should continue as a priority. (F.5.)**

**Response:** The recommendation has been implemented.

All APS and CAR staff received comprehensive training and participated in job shadowing to competently perform both APS and CAR functions. Training for new staff was completed in May 2015. Social workers are assessed regarding their competency levels to perform both APS and CAR functions on a regular basis. Ongoing training and support will be provided to any additional new staff and current staff, as needed and determined appropriate.



**R.3.** All documentation completed by hotline social workers should be examined with the goal of eliminating redundancies in order to allow quicker completion of the paperwork, thus freeing up social workers for waiting calls. (F.6.)

**Response:** The recommendation has been implemented.

SSA CAR management assessed documentation to reduce or eliminate redundancies for CAR (hotline) social workers. The requirement for CAR social workers to summarize prior CAR reports has been eliminated.

**R. 4.** The Social Services Agency and the Child Abuse Registry should become more proactive in addressing the excessive number of dropped calls and establish strategies and policies to reduce the dropped-call rate with an initial goal of returning to less than 5%. A partial list of strategies that could be considered for dealing with spike volume periods include:

- a) training and requiring staff to multitask (taking a waiting call prior to completing the post-call work on the previous call);
- b) designating supervisors to answer waiting calls; and
- c) specifying staff members to triage calls to determine the level of urgency and potentially taking a message for call-back.

**Response:** This recommendation has been implemented.

SSA management recognizes the concerning rate of dropped calls during peak times and has been analyzing data and trends to reduce that number. Specific policies and strategies are in place to deal with peak periods to address dropped call rates during long wait times. In addition, SSA has consulted with other southern county Child Abuse Registries to identify ways in which to address this serious issue.

Many of these strategies were implemented prior to and during the Grand Jury investigation. In addition, SSA continues to evaluate and implement new strategies as appropriate.

SSA has incorporated the partial list of strategies to dealing with spike volume periods as appropriate. Measures taken to reduce the dropped call rate during peak times include merging the CAR and APS Registries to increase agency capacity and efficiency, training all social workers to both take and screen CAR and APS hotline calls, implementing a call message-taking system to help triage and ensure that a caller can leave a message and receive a return call promptly, reducing data entry requirements by eliminating the need for social workers to summarize prior CAR

reports, implementing a protocol indicating how/when hotline supervisors will serve as back-ups to screen calls during peak volume times, assessing and adjusting staffing times to manage the workload/call volume, and continuing to make CAR dropped calls a priority at all levels of management by making it a standing item on meeting agendas. In addition, SSA reallocated staff and received approval from the Board of Supervisors for new positions in order to increase staffing at CAR.

Ongoing training is an important component of any strategy to reduce and eliminate dropped calls. All APS and CAR staff received comprehensive training and participated in job shadowing to competently perform both APS and CAR functions. Training for new staff was completed in May 2015. Social workers are assessed regarding their competency levels to perform both APS and CAR functions on a regular basis. Ongoing training and support will be provided to any additional new staff and current staff, as needed and determined appropriate.

As a result of these efforts, statistics show that the dropped call percentages in the past four months have remained under 4%, indicating a significant reduction in dropped calls. The exact percentages of dropped calls since March 2015 were as follows:

Month	% Dropped Calls
March 2015	3.40 %
April 2015	2.72 %
May 2015	3.22 %
June 2015	2.49 %

SSA did share with the Grand Jury that the dropped call rate had significantly decreased and provided March 2015 data to assist in the course of their investigation.

Ultimately, SSA views every call as important and strives to answer each call that comes into the hotline. As a result, SSA Management has set an internal challenge goal of a 0% daily dropped call rate and will continue to explore and implement strategies in order to reach that goal. SSA measures and tracks the dropped call rate on a daily basis.