



County of Orange
C a l i f o r n i a

Thomas G. Mauk
County Executive Officer

August 14, 2007

Honorable Nancy Wieben Stock
Presiding Judge of the Superior Court of California
700 Civic Center Drive West
Santa Ana, CA 92702

Subject: Response to Orange County Grand Jury Report, "Where are
Orange County's Foster Children"

Dear Judge Stock:

Per your request, and in accordance with Penal Code 933, enclosed please find the County of Orange response to the subject report as approved by the Board of Supervisors. If you have any questions, please contact Theresa Stanberry at (714) 834-3727 in the County Executive Office who will either assist you or direct you to the appropriate individual.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Thomas G. Mauk". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Thomas G. Mauk
County Executive Officer

Enclosure

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2006-07 Grand Jury Report
Where are Orange County's Foster Children?
Response to Findings and Recommendations

Responses to Findings

F-1 **Caseloads**: SSA has not lowered caseloads for those social workers serving out of county child placements.

Response: Agree with finding.

F-2 **Travel Time**: The lengthy travel time to clients outside of Orange County by social workers may reduce time available for actual social work.

Response: Agree with finding.

F-3 **Group Homes**: Group homes in Orange County are underutilized by Orange County CFS.

Response: Disagree wholly with finding.

Due to Federal and State mandates and the Family-to-Family initiative (Anne E. Casey Foundation), there is an increase in the number of children remaining with their parents or being placed with relatives and Non-Related Extended Family Members (NREFMs). Therefore, the number of children in congregate care has decreased. Social Services Agency's (SSA) Children and Family Service (CFS) Division utilizes group homes in Orange County, with effective programming and skilled staff, when a group home placement is warranted and the group home meets the individualized needs of the child.

F-4 **Transportation Costs**: More than \$1.5 million dollars is being spent for transportation to Orange County foster children yearly, not including mileage paid to caretakers.

Response: Disagree wholly with finding.

This amount includes all travel and transportation for CFS, not exclusively transportation to Orange County foster children.

F-5 **Alternative Model**: There exists interest and support in the Orange County community for the San Pasquel model program.

Response: Agree with finding.

Response to Recommendations

R-1 **Caseloads**: Caseloads of social workers should be adjusted to factor in out of county placements.

Response: The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not reasonable.

As the staff informed the Grand Jury, SB 2030 Child Welfare Services Workload Study Final Report, issued in April 2000, contains recommendations for adjusting caseloads to ensure best practices could be implemented by counties. CFS is already in the process of implementing caseload adjustments system wide based on SB 2030 guidelines, not according to out-of-county placements.

- R-2 **Group Homes**: In order to reduce travel time for caseworkers, families and children, SSA should encourage placement of children in FFAs and Group Homes within Orange County.

Response: The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not reasonable.

As indicated by staff to the Grand Jury, Federal (Adoptions and Safe Families Act, 1997) and State (Assembly Bill 636, 2001) legislation mandates the preference for the placement of dependent children. When a child is unable to remain in his or her own home, first preference is to place with a relative. If a relative is not available or does not meet the approval criteria, the next preference is to place with a NREFM. Federal and State mandates require preference to place with relatives and NREFMs, even if they reside outside of Orange County. SSA makes placements outside of Orange County in accordance to these mandates. The children currently placed or considered for placement in congregate care require intensive therapeutic services and are only placed in out-of-county group homes if the services they require are not available locally.

- R-3 **Outsourcing**: SSA should engage in collaborative discussions with Orange County group homes to improve their relationships and reduce outsourcing of Orange County foster children to neighboring counties.

Response: The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted.

As the staff informed the Grand Jury, this recommendation is not consistent with Federal and State mandates, which specify preference for out-of-home child placements, as stated above in Recommendation #2. In addition, CFS does not “outsource” Orange County foster children to neighboring counties. Children are placed according to their individual needs. Resources for severely emotionally disturbed children are limited in Orange County; and therefore, if a child requires this level of care, the most appropriate placement may be in an adjacent county.

SSA actively engages in collaborative discussions with Orange County group home providers. SSA has agreements with approximately 17 group home providers in Orange County. CFS also participates on two forums with Orange County group home providers. The Group Home Advisory Board is chaired by an Executive Director of a local group home and includes the CFS Director and the Executive Directors from Orange County group homes. The Group Home Forum is held quarterly and is chaired by CFS’ Monitoring and Investigations Unit. The forum is open to all group home operators that have an agreement with SSA. Both forums include collaborative discussions regarding meeting the needs of dependent children that require group home care.

R-4 **Transportation Costs**: Money saved in transportation costs could be considered as the financial incentive to promote more Orange County foster care and group home providers.

Response: *The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not reasonable.*

As the staff informed the Grand Jury, Federal and State mandates require preference to place with relatives and NREFMs, even if they reside outside of Orange County. SSA makes placements outside of Orange County in accordance to these mandates.

R-5 **Alternative Model**: SSA should consider the San Pasqual model program for a similar facility in Orange County.

Response: *The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted.*

SSA is not interested in developing or operating a San Pasqual model program. This is inconsistent with Federal and State mandates, which specifically state that children should be placed in a family-centered environment. If a San Pasqual model program is developed in Orange County by another organization, SSA will consider referring children for placement if they require the level of care the facility provides.