



March 18, 2003

Honorable Frederick P. Horn
Presiding Judge of the Superior Court
700 Civic Center Drive West
Santa Ana, CA 92701

Dear Honorable Judge Horn:

The Children and Families Commission of Orange County received the Orange County Grand Jury report, *Proposition 10 Spotlight: Healthy Children, Strong Families* that was released to the public on February 24, 2003.

The Children and Families Commission responded to the seven findings and four recommendations included in the Grand Jury report at their March 5, 2003 Commission meeting. The Commission approved response is included as required by Penal Code 933.

On behalf of the Children and Families Commission, I want to thank the 2002-2003 Grand Jury for their intensive research to understand the mission and goals of the Commission. We appreciate the commendation included in the report, and will continue to update the Grand Jury on the implementation status of the recommendations that are not fully implemented at this time.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael M. Ruane".

Michael M. Ruane
Executive Director
Children and Families Commission of Orange County

cc: Children and Families Commission of Orange County Members



**RESPONSE TO FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS TO
2002-2003 ORANGE COUNTY GRAND JURY REPORT
“PROPOSITION 10 SPOTLIGHT: HEALTHY CHILDREN, STRONG FAMILIES**

RESPONSE TO FINDINGS:

- 1. Children and Families Commission of Orange County maintains the program criteria consistent with state guidelines and purposes of the Children and Families First Act of 1998.**

Response to Finding #1: Agrees with finding.

The Commission funded programs meet the state guidelines and purposes of the legislation that include restricting funding to new programs that support the health and education of young children from the prenatal stage to age five.

- 2. Children and Families Commission of Orange County ensures that grantees spend funds according to the criteria consistent with state guidelines and purposes of the Children and Families Act of 1998.**

Response to Finding #2: Agrees with finding.

The Commission performs regular audits on funded programs to confirm that Commission funds are properly used according to the state guidelines and legislative mandates.

- 3. Some children and family programs have been fragmented and overlapping in Orange County.**

Response to Finding #3: Agrees with finding.

The Commission consistently funds programs that demonstrate collaboration among organizations and agencies that provide services to children and families. The Commission’s encouragement of collaborative efforts serves to eliminate fragmentation and duplicative services.

- 4. Difficulty in defining or creating clear solutions to any one issue is the result of the many organizations directing their resources and efforts toward defining and solving problems. The variety of assessments exemplifies the variety of approaches.**

Response to Finding #4: Agrees with finding.

Many assessments and studies have been conducted within the last few years that have benefited the Commission in identifying gaps in services, and clarifying the need for new and expanded programs. Several of the assessments are a one-time effort, but the Commission will continue to utilize *The Annual Report on the Conditions of Children in Orange County*, the *Orange County Community Indicators Report* and other assessments in conjunction with its planning sessions.

- 5. Multiple service systems and programs lead to difficulty in creating any clear/credible message for the public.**

Response to Finding #5: Agrees with finding.

The Commission continues to use local media and public outreach efforts to educate the community about the programs and services that are available to children and families. The new Commission-sponsored KOCE-TV program “Help Me Grow” is another outlet for communicating these messages and linking programs and services.

- 6. Prevention offers the greatest opportunity to serve the most needs in the most cost effective manner and will save dollars in remedial programs, treatment services and social services.**

Response to Finding #6: Agrees with finding.

The Commission strongly believes in developing prevention programs to assist children and families before a problem begins or becomes too difficult to address, and to focus on long-term cost savings. The Commission invests in prevention programs in areas such as pediatric health, oral health, childhood overweight and obesity, and child abuse.

- 7. Long standing neighborhood child care programs have very long wait lists and are threatened by state and county budget cuts and poor economic conditions.**

Response to Finding #7: Agrees with finding.

The Commission continues to co-sponsor the annual *Orange County Community Indicators Report*, which includes an assessment of the availability, cost, and quality of childcare in Orange County. This annual report has indicated that the availability and affordability of quality childcare remains an ongoing challenge in Orange County.

RESPONSE TO RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 1. Move forward all assessments with the purpose of avoiding fragmentation and duplication of effort while still capturing all needed data. In addition, synthesize some of the key data thereby exposing professionals to cross cutting data and fostering integrated, concentrated impacts. (Finding 3 and 4)**

Response to Recommendation #1: This recommendation is partially implemented; the recommendation will be fully implemented by October 2003.

The Commission is the lead agency for developing *The Ninth Annual Report on the Conditions of Children in Orange County* and will utilize the data for its annual planning activities. The report will also address the assessments the Grand Jury identified that are prepared by the Orange County Child Care and Development Planning Council, the Center for the Community Collaboration, Children and Families Future, and the Orange County Child Care Coordinator. In addition, the Commission is a sponsor of the *Orange County Health Needs Assessment* that is updated every three years. The Commission was a funding partner for the *Early Care and Education Needs of Orange County* (ECENA), a one-time assessment to assist with developing a plan for the early care and education in Orange County.

The Commission is also a co-sponsor of the annual *Orange County Community Indicators Report*, which utilizes the results from the various assessments in an integrated, unified “report card” for the entire county. The Commission Executive Director serves as Project Director for this effort.

Given the Commission’s active role in the various independent assessments cited in the Grand Jury Report, the Commission understands the value of these individual products. However, the Commission agrees that there is an ongoing need to avoid the fragmentation and duplication of effort in data collection. Accordingly, the Commission will convene (or co-sponsor with the County of Orange) a targeted strategic review involving the entities preparing needs assessments and similar periodic reports with the goal of promoting more integrated and efficient data collection efforts and to reduce any duplication of efforts. A report and recommendations will be submitted for Commission action prior to October 1, 2003.

- 2. Promote a clear picture of programs and providers to create a unified message or system to help all families define their needs and access appropriate, helpful programs. (Finding 5)**

Response to Recommendation #2: The recommendation has been implemented.

The Commission's partnerships with local hospitals, elementary school districts, and family support organizations are also information and referral networks for parents, caregivers, and the community. In addition, the Commission uses local media including newspapers, parenting magazines, and local television (KOCE) to communicate unified messages to link families to applicable services and programs. The Commission has dedicated funding to the development of specific communication strategies for early childhood development and health programs to promote a more unified and clear message.

3. Continue to emphasize how important the childhood years are to the future of a child. (Finding 6)

Response to Recommendation #3: The recommendation has been implemented.

The Commission will continue to develop prevention programs to assist children and families identify and address potential problems early. The Commission will continue with the implementation of prevention programs in areas of pediatric health, oral health, childhood overweight and obesity, and child abuse. The new KOCE program "Help Me Grow" will reinforce these important messages. The Commission will also continue to support new and innovative methods of sending information to families and caregivers.

4. Continue to emphasize prevention programs for better outcomes for families and future savings. At the same time continue to foster integrated, concentrated impacts in child care programs to effect (affect) the lives of even more children. (Findings 6 and 7)

Response to Recommendation #4: The recommendation has been implemented.

Prevention programs are current priorities within the Commission's Strategic Plan and consistent with the Commission's overall goal of supporting families to prepare their children to be healthy and ready to learn when they enter school. In conjunction with the implementation of preventive programs, the Commission will continue to coordinate with health care organizations, family support providers, the early education community, and school districts to implement programs to meet the needs of young children. The Commission will also continue to encourage collaboration and opportunities to leverage funds to maximize the Proposition 10, tobacco tax revenues. The Commission is providing funding and operational support to the new position of Orange County Child Care Coordinator to achieve better outcomes for childcare programs.