



SERVICE EMPLOYEES
INTERNATIONAL UNION, CTW, CLC

March 18, 2010

Trish Ploehn, Director
Los Angeles County
Department of Children and Family Services
425 South Shatto Place
Los Angeles, CA 90020

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Dear Director Ploehn:

Local 721 is well aware of the crisis in Emergency Response (ER); these units have a backlog of 6,900 referrals that are over 30 days old (Over 30s), amounting to 15,200 children that are languishing in the system. It is the Union's position that the Department's own actions have largely created this crisis.

During the summer of 2009, the Department put every CSW with any proximity to a child death case on desk duty, effectively removing over 50 CSWs from service. While these CSWs spent months on desk duty, the number of referrals grew, with insufficient staff to respond effectively. Alongside this counterproductive practice, the Department and individual offices continue to institute policies and procedures – some official, some unofficial – that unnecessarily increase the time and work that go into closing each referral. These actions have seriously contributed to the backlog of Over 30s in ER.

The Department's response to this crisis is to redeploy workers from several programs to ER. SEIU Local 721 welcomes the Department's efforts to increase front line staff and bring down caseloads in ER, but if the redeployment is not implemented correctly, it will create additional crises in the Department. The Union has attempted to work with the Department to ensure that the redeployment runs smoothly, in order to avoid such crises. On January 13, Local 721 met with the Department and requested the plan for the redeployment effort, including the formula used by the Department to determine which CSWs would be move, and where.

The Department did not comply with this request. Instead, the Department sent a series of memos to the Union and to CSWs, none of which provided complete details of the redeployment plan. On February 4, the Department sent a short memo to all staff outlining the programs affected, the number of workers affected, and the redeployment process. On February 12, the Department sent out another memo detailing "reassignment" of workers instead of redeployment, as well as a series of changes designed to reduce over 30s. For workers, it was unclear whether the February 4 and 12 memos were related, or whether the February 12 memo supersedes the February 4 memo. Finally, in late February and early March, redeployed workers received memos detailing their new assignments.

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Numerous memos and a lack of consistency from office to office has created confusion, undue stress, and lack of clarity about the Department's overall plan for redeployment and long term plan to address the crisis in ER.

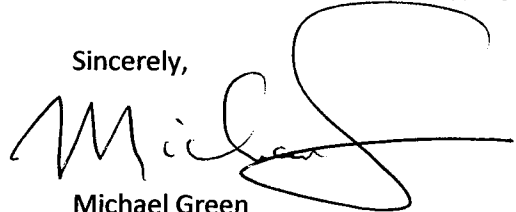
The Union proposes the following solutions:

- The Department should write one overall plan that outlines the temporary redeployment and reassignment of workers. Such plan should make clear the distinction between redeployment and reassignment, provide comprehensive details of how workers will be selected for redeployment (keeping in mind the "inverse seniority" requirement for transfers, as agreed to in the MOU), and indicate how redeployed workers' existing cases will be handled.
- Provide uniform training for all workers who are being redeployed and reassigned. Many workers will have little or no ER experience. If they arrive in ER units without sufficient training, this will hurt morale, jeopardize the redeployment and reassignment effort, and put children in danger. Such training should include training units for those CSWs who have no ER experience.
- All workers who volunteered to be redeployed should be given their choice of office. These workers are making a voluntary sacrifice for the good of the children under the Department's care, and the Department led them to believe that they would be placed at their chosen offices. The MOU also clearly states that "voluntary requests should be reviewed and honored first."
- The Department should guarantee that the redeployment will be temporary, and that individual workers' redeployment assignments will not be extended or made permanent. Prior to redeployment the Department should inform redeployed and reassigned workers of the duration of their temporary assignment.

Overwhelmingly, CSWs across the Department recognize that the redeployment effort is necessary. What workers do not accept is the Department's handling of the redeployment thus far. The policy has been imposed from the top, and instead of heeding the workers' request for transparency and clear communication, the Department sent out a series of missives that confused the situation and left workers feeling disrespected. The solutions laid out in this letter will go a long way toward improving morale and ensuring a smooth redeployment that allows ER units to get back on track. Please respond to our proposed solutions by Tuesday, March 23.

Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael Green", with a large, stylized flourish extending from the end of the name.

Michael Green
Director, Social Services Division
SEIU Local 721