



# UNITED VOICES FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES



October 25, 2013

Mr. Philip Browning  
Director, Department of Children and Family Services  
425 Shatto Place  
Los Angeles, CA 90020

Dear Mr. Browning:

We, United Voices for Children and Families, a coalition of public child welfare advocates working to reform the Los Angeles Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) write to join you in your efforts to ensure the welfare of our children and families most in need.

In order to immediately improve child safety, we believe that the County of Los Angeles must do better by its children and must bargain in good faith with DCFS social workers rather than simply advocating for the status quo. LA County has an opportunity to be a leader in establishing a system based on allowing social workers the time needed to identify and understand how to help children at risk of neglect and abuse and children already in foster care. Caseloads for child welfare workers in the County are significantly higher than the recognized national standards for emergency workers and family service caseworkers.

The County has a reserve of \$2.6 billion—\$1.6 billion of which is available for spending for any governmental purpose<sup>1</sup>—yet year after year the County reports that one of its critical unmet needs includes additional funding to hire the 1,400 social workers needed to ensure that maximum services are provided to children and families.<sup>2</sup>

We are committed to working collaboratively with the County and other stakeholders to develop innovative approaches to maximize existing funding streams and to develop synergies

<sup>1</sup> SEIU Local 721, *It's Time to Turn the Corner in Los Angeles County* (Apr. 16, 2013) (online at [www.seiu721.org/LACountyWhitePaper.pdf](http://www.seiu721.org/LACountyWhitePaper.pdf)).

<sup>2</sup> County of Los Angeles, *2013-14 Recommended Budget Volume 1* (April 2013) (online at <http://ceo.lacounty.gov/pdf/budget/2014/2013-14%20Official%20Recommended%20Budget%20Book%20Volume%20One%20Online%20Version.pdf>).

with private grant makers. The County's participation in a federal Title IV-E waiver, which authorizes DCFS to spend federal and state foster care funds flexibly and reinvest savings to meet a range of child welfare goals, is an excellent example of how creative approaches to child welfare funding can have profound impacts for advancing well-being outcomes for children.

Developing partnerships with community organizations such as Community Coalition, the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), and California Youth Connection will not only help DCFS to identify the scope and nature of challenges that families face, but may also lead to nontraditional sources of funding. The new Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) for K-12 education is one mechanism which holds promise to deliver more resources to foster children; however, because there is no consistent method used to identify this population, many foster youth will remain underserved and invisible. We were shocked to discover that DCFS' Kinship Services unit consists of only seven social workers assigned to monitor and support the needs of over 8,000 children residing with kin.<sup>3</sup>

A comprehensive review of how foster youth are underserved in education settings is just one example of how braiding the strands of the child welfare agencies, social worker units, advocacy groups, and care and early learning professionals who encounter children who have come in contact with our child protective system can bring attention and support to a previously invisible, deeply vulnerable population.

The status quo is unacceptable. That is why we support the adoption of the "Children First" social worker plan. Under the plan, the County would hire 35 additional children's social workers each month until reaching the goal of hiring 1,400 new direct service social workers. Mr. Browning, in an appearance before the Board of Supervisors just this week, reiterated that this goal was absolutely necessary. This phased-in approach is a manageable solution to absorb growth in infrastructure, ensure quality training, and effectively reduce existing caseloads while ensuring that these new social workers are assigned to areas of high need, including kinship and long-term guardian settings.

This plan is actionable, and only requires the political will and moral courage to establish it at the start of 2014. By year's end, the County would have an additional 420 trained children's social workers for a cost of under \$47 million.

Giving a voice to all stakeholders that work with foster youth is imperative as we move forward to reform public child welfare. As organizations dedicated to reforming the broken child welfare system, we stand as United Voices in support of the "Children First" social worker plan. We support the Los Angeles County Social Workers in their fight to ensure better working conditions that are conducive to child safety and language in their contract that serves children with the highest standard of care.

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<sup>3</sup> Discussion with Community Coalition referring to children living with relatives both in and out of the system; Discussion with DCFS children's social worker supervisor; see U.C. Berkeley Center for Social Services Research, Child Welfare Services Reports for California (Apr. 2013) (online at [http://cssr.berkeley.edu/ucb\\_childwelfare/](http://cssr.berkeley.edu/ucb_childwelfare/)).

Thank you in advance for your willingness to discuss this important issue with us. A member of our coalition will call your office to schedule a meeting as soon as possible and establish an ongoing dialogue.

Dedicated to a stronger and safer LA County,

UNITED VOICES FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

C:

Hon. Gloria Molina

Hon. Mark Ridley-Thomas

Hon. Zev Yaroslavsky

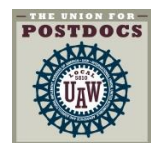
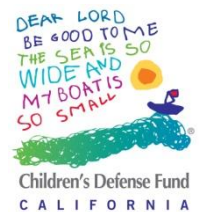
Hon. Don Knabe

Hon. Michael D. Antonovich

Distinguished Panel, Blue Ribbon Commission on Child Protection

Co-signed by the following:

- Children's Defense Fund
- National Organization for Women Orange County
- Students for Education Reform
- Eastmont Community Center
- Regis House Community Center
- CARECEN
- United Way
- Raising California Together
- Inner City Struggle
- Los Angeles Metropolitan Churches
- Brotherhood Crusade
- Advancement Project
- National Latino Evangelical Coalition
- Clergy and Laity United for Economic Justice
- Crenshaw Subway Coalition
- CHIRLA
- St. John's Well Child & Family Center
- Jewish Labor Committee
- NAACP—LA
- SCOPE
- 9to5
- Shields for Families
- Californians for Safety and Justice
- Health Access California
- California National Organization of Women
- Strategic Actions for a Just Economy
- Black Worker Center
- LAANE
- Holman United Methodist Church
- Refund California Coalition
- Asian Americans Advancing Justice



Center for Asian Americans United for Self Empowerment  
Korean Resource Center  
Labor Council for Latin American Advancement  
Church One Ministries  
Safe Passages  
SEIU Local 99, Education Workers United  
APALA  
Heart of Compassion  
Southern Christian Leadership Council, Los Angeles  
National Action Network  
St. Mary's Episcopal Church  
Youth Policy Institute  
California Youth Connections  
Parent Institute for Quality Education  
Pueblo y Salud  
Weller Street Missionary Baptist Church  
St. Agnes Catholic Church  
Koreatown Immigrant Workers Alliance  
Restaurant Opportunities Center, Los Angeles  
UCLA Labor Center  
U.C. Postdoctoral Scholars, UAW 5810

