

Los Angeles County
Commission for Children
and Families

2021 Annual Report

EXECUTIVE OFFICE



BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES

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COMMISSION FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES 2021 ROSTER

FIRST SUPERVISORIAL DISTRICT

Supervisor Hilda Solis

Maria Brenes

Wendy Garen

Steve Zimmer

SECOND SUPERVISORIAL DISTRICT

Supervisor Holly Mitchell

Charity Chandler-Cole

Zaid Gayle

Franco Vega

Carol O. Biondi (former)

THIRD SUPERVISORIAL DISTRICT

Supervisor Sheila Kuehl

Gale Caswell

Dr. Jacquelyn McCroskey

Dr. Wendy B. Smith

FOURTH SUPERVISORIAL DISTRICT

Supervisor Janice Hahn

William Bedrossian

Tiffany Boyd

Eli Romero

Wendelyn Julien (former)

FIFTH SUPERVISORIAL DISTRICT

Supervisor Kathryn Barger

Shimica Gaskins

Dr. Jeanette Mann

Lou Moore

Liz Seipel (former)

COMMISSION OFFICERS

Wendy Garen, Chair

Shimica Gaskins, Vice Chair

Zaid Gayle, Vice Chair

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dr. Tamara N. Hunter

COMMISSION FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

MISSION STATEMENT AND ORDINANCE

MISSION STATEMENT

The Commission for Children and Families advises the Board of Supervisors on strengthening service delivery systems and enhancing partnerships to create safer and more secure futures for Los Angeles County's at-risk children and their families.

ORDINANCE

The Commission was created by the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors (Board) on May 8, 1984, and is charged by its ordinance to:

- Review all programs administered by County departments that provide services for at-risk children;
- Receive input from appropriate community groups and individuals concerning administered children's services programs;
- Review and make recommendations to the Board concerning legislation dealing with children's needs;
- Make recommendations, as necessary, to various County department heads to improve children's services;
- Make recommendations, as necessary, to the Board on action to be taken to improve children's services; and,
- Provide an annual report to the Board concerning the status of children's services, along with recommendations for their improvement, to be utilized for broad community distribution and discussion.

YEAR IN REVIEW: KEY ISSUES IMPACTING CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

COVID-19 Pandemic

The most pressing issue of the year 2021 for Los Angeles County- and the world- continued to be the COVID-19 pandemic. Throughout the year, we endured peaks and valleys in the battle against COVID-19. Vaccines became widely available for adults in early 2021, and for children aged five and older in November. Most youth in Los Angeles County achieved a degree of normalcy by returning to some configuration of in-person learning. However, by the close of the year, new infections in the County were increasing at a rapid and alarming rate.

Nearly two years into the pandemic, we are learning more about its consequences for young people. In December 2021, the United States Surgeon General issued the Protecting Youth Mental Health Report¹, which detailed the challenges and trauma brought about by these extraordinary conditions. The report noted an increase in anxiety, depression, and other mental health concerns among young people, and underscored that these issues most significantly impacted the most vulnerable, such as youth with intellectual and developmental disabilities, those with low socioeconomic status, and youth involved with the juvenile justice and child welfare systems. The report emphasized our collective responsibility for supporting youth during this difficult time, and

included a comprehensive set of actions that stakeholders can undertake to improve youth mental health and well-being.

Continuum of Out-of-Home Care Crisis

During the period of review, a confluence of factors revealed the crisis state of the County's foster care system.

On January 2, 2021, five youth placed at Wayfinder Short-Term Therapeutic Program (STRTP) assaulted and killed a staff member during an altercation at the facility. Although this shocking incident was extreme, in many ways, it was a harbinger of the trying year to come.

In 2021, several STRTPs closed their doors permanently due to myriad factors, including their professed inability to meet the needs of youth with very high-level and complex needs, as well as an inability to adhere to the requirements of the Family First Prevention Services Act, which went into effect in October 2021. These closures were blows to the system, which, in part, had already been diminished by the unrealized vision of California's Continuum of Care Reform.

In August, the California Department of Social Services issued guidance extending foster care eligibility for youth who would turn 21 on or before December 31, 2021, as part of the state's response to COVID-19. This action led to more than 1300 youth projected to age out of Los Angeles County's

foster care system by the end of the year. The large number of youth exiting the system during the same time period served as a stress test, and the County's struggles to identify stable housing for many of these transitioning young people illuminated further deficits in the continuum of care, and highlighted the pitfalls of failing to prioritize prevention of homelessness among transition age youth.

Leadership Shifts at the Department of Children and Family Services

In November 2021, Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) director, Bobby D. Cagle announced his resignation, effective December 31, 2021. Chief Deputy Director, Ginger Pryor will serve as acting director through March 2022. A national search for a new director is projected to continue through early 2022.

Poverty Alleviation

A bright spot during this period of review was the Board of Supervisors' (Board) resolve to take on one of society's most intractable problems- poverty. In May 2021, the Board declared poverty and economic opportunity to be matters of public health, and established the Poverty Alleviation Initiative (PAI). The PAI is charged with leading the development and implementation of a countywide poverty alleviation policy agenda. The PAI will also pilot guaranteed basic income programs, including one which will target transition age youth. Given the intersection of poverty, maltreatment, and systems-involvement, the Commission participated in a listening session to help inform the PAI's strategic plan, and is deeply supportive of the initiative's success.

During this period of review, the Commission declared this County’s transformation to a child and family well-being system to be its North Star. The Commission’s commitment to this goal is reflected in its priorities and activities, as described in this report. The Commission’s work was supported by the Commission Services Division of the Executive Office of the Board of Supervisors.

Focus Area: Equity and Racial Justice

The Commission’s standing Racial Justice Committee (RJC) continued to lead efforts related to equity and racial justice, with a focus on addressing racial disproportionality and disparity among Black families. The RJC, comprised of more than half of the Commission’s membership, was very active during the review period.

Knowledge is Power Data Summit: Making Data Accessible and Actionable to Achieve Well-Being for Black Children and Families

In July 2021, the Commission began planning the Knowledge is Power Data Summit (Summit), which aims to leverage the power of data to improve outcomes experienced by child welfare-impacted Black children and families. The three-part Summit will serve as an arena through which stakeholders will increase their awareness and understanding of key data insights, which will be contextualized and humanized by lived experience narrative, and combined with innovative thought to foster the development of new solutions to decades old challenges.

Summit Part I, projected for Spring 2022, will tell the story of ‘what brings Black families into contact with the child welfare system’ by focusing on the

“front end” of the system. Summit Part I will feature LA County-specific data related to:

- Communities with high levels of child welfare involvement;
- Prevention;
- Pathways into the system, including the child protection hotline, mandated reporting, and emergency response investigations;
- Unpacking the allegation “general neglect”; and
- Access to services.

Summit Part II will center on continuing services and out-of-home care; Part III will be devoted to transition age youth (TAY), and both are projected to take place later in 2022.

The Summit Part I planning committee or *Design Team* is comprised of a diverse group of stakeholders, including, but not limited to:

- Casey Family Programs;
- California Child Welfare Indicators Project;
- Children’s Data Network;
- DCFS;
- the Fourth Supervisorial District;
- Children’s Law Center;
- Los Angeles Dependency Lawyers;
- community-based partners; and
- representatives with lived experience.

Los Angeles County Anti-Racism, Diversity, and Inclusion Initiative: Equity Explorer

The Anti-Racism, Diversity, and Inclusion Initiative (ARDI) is developing the Equity Explorer dashboard, a web-based geo-spatial tool that is designed to facilitate measurement of equity and disparities throughout the County. The tool will host typical equity indicators, such as demographic and socioeconomic information, as well as non-traditional data, such as tenant vulnerability and food security mapping.

The Equity Explorer tool will be featured in the Summit to illuminate the conditions of communities with high levels of child welfare involvement. As part of the planning, the Commission served as a lead on integrating relevant Los Angeles County child welfare data into the Equity Explorer.

Integration of child welfare data into the Equity Explorer will have significant utility beyond the Summit, as it will allow for granular analysis of the nexus of need, disparity, and public child welfare involvement by place, which can be used to inform equitable decision making and resource allocation. To carry out this work, the Commission partnered with ARDI, the County's Geographic Information System (GIS) Division, the California Child Welfare Indicators Project, and DCFS.

Eliminating Racial Disparity and Disproportionality Advisory Committee

Commission RJC members were actively involved in the Eliminating Racial Disparity and

Disproportionality (ERDD) Advisory Committee during this period of review.

As part of the ERDD Faith-Based Subcommittee, the Commission representative worked to identify and develop strategies for addressing factors that impede the partnership between the faith community and DCFS, and serve as barriers to addressing disproportionality and disparity among Black youth and families.

As part of the ERDD Prevention Subcommittee, representatives focused on mandated reporting and took part in a review of mandated reporter training curricula that is utilized by various organizations. This work dovetails with a broader Commission-led mandated reporting effort that is detailed in the Maltreatment Prevention section of this report.

Courageous Conversations Project

A Commission representative served as co-lead of the Foster Together Network's Equity Committee and its Courageous Conversations project. The Courageous Conversations project aims to improve outcomes for Black youth through exploration of the intersection of race and foster care. The project will begin with a series of focus groups conducted with key populations: (1.) non-Black resource parents and STRTP staff who care for Black children and youth, (2.) Black former foster youth, and (3.) parents and relatives of Black children who have been placed with non-Black caregivers. The focus groups will center on understanding experiences, perceptions, and attitudes related to Black children

in foster care. Focus group findings will be utilized to inform policy, training, and other strategies designed to provide better support to caregivers, and ultimately, to enhance the quality of care provided to youth. The UCLA-Pritzker Center was engaged to conduct the focus groups and develop the summary of findings report, which is projected to be released in Spring 2022.

Focus Area: Maltreatment Prevention

Preventing child maltreatment has been a longstanding priority of the Commission. During the reporting period, Commission representatives engaged deeply in efforts to bolster all levels of prevention in Los Angeles County.

Mandated Supporting Initiative

In mid-2021, the Commission began focusing on mandated reporting, with the goal of facilitating Los Angeles County's transformation from a system of mandated reporting to one of mandated *supporting*, which

- Keeps children safe *and* facilitates family well-being;
- provides preventive support to families who are in need, but don't require a DCFS intervention; and,
- addresses the role of mandated reporting in racial disproportionality and disparity.

To achieve this goal, transformational efforts will target three impact areas:

1. Mandated Reporter Training;

2. Organizational Policy and Practice; and,
3. Building Pathways to connect families in need to the County's emerging infrastructure of community-based prevention services.

The work in these impact areas will be informed by data, best practices, and the experiences of those involved with and impacted by mandated reporting, and rooted in meaningful stakeholder engagement and effective cross-sector collaboration.

Stakeholder Engagement

During this period of review, the Commission initiated targeted stakeholder engagement and met with representatives from key mandated reporting organizations, including:

- Los Angeles Unified School District;
- Long Beach Unified School District;
- Palmdale Unified School District;
- Antelope Valley Union High School District
- Lancaster School District;
- Los Angeles County Office of Education;
- Los Angeles Police Department,
- Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department;
- Long Beach Police Department; and,
- DCFS.

Listening sessions with key stakeholders are projected to begin in February 2022. These sessions will focus on understanding stakeholders' perceptions of and experiences with mandated reporting, including those related organizational training and policy, as well as views on how to improve the process and better support families in need.

Collaboration

As noted in the Equity and Racial Justice section of this report, Commission representatives worked closely with the ERDD Prevention Subcommittee to conduct a review of mandated reporter training curricula utilized by various organizations, including youth and family-serving County departments and most of the above-listed stakeholders. Curricula review findings will be used to identify important themes, best practices, critical gaps, and inform recommendations for enhancements.

In addition to the ERDD Prevention Subcommittee, several other stakeholders launched mandated reporting-related initiatives during this period of review. In response to this broad interest in mandated reporting, in November 2021, the Commission established and convened the Los Angeles County Mandated *Supporting* Work Group to increase and enhance coordination and collaboration among public sector, non-profit, and community-based stakeholders, and to maximize the collective impact of mutually reinforcing activities².

Family First Prevention Services Act

During the reporting period, Commission representatives worked to support the County's planning for Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) implementation, and participated in the following FFPSA planning groups:

- **Los Angeles Family First Advisory Committee**
The Committee serves as the central hub and advisory body for FFPSA planning;
- **FFPSA Policy and Training Work Group**
The Work Group is tasked with developing the County's FFPSA-related policy and training plans, which includes conducting a review of current policy and training;
- **FFPSA Practice Work Group**
This Work Group focused on developing practice-related recommendations for FFPSA implementation, including those for assessment and referral processes.
- **FFPSA Research/Continuous Quality Improvement Work Group**
This Work Group assessed available data, requirements for new data collection and is preparing recommendations to address short- and longer-term data issues.
- **FFPSA Communications Work Group**
The Work Group is tasked with developing the FFPSA communications strategy for internal and external stakeholders. The Commission representative served as lead on communications and outreach to faith-based organizations; and,
- **FFPSA Community Pathway Work Group**
The Work Group is tasked with developing the strategy to connect non-DCFS involved families with FFPSA-funded, community-

based supportive services to prevent child welfare system involvement. The Commission representative worked closely with the Probation department to ensure that eligible Probation-supervised youth and families are integrated into the planning.

Preventing Maltreatment of Young Children

The Commission's representative continued to serve as a leader in the County's efforts to keep young children safe and facilitate family well-being.

In 2021, the representative engaged in the following efforts:

- **First 5 LA Board of Commissioners**
The representative held a seat, supported implementation of the Impact Framework, and contributed to the development of the organization's new Home-Based Child Care Strategy;
- **Policy Roundtable for Child Care and Development**
The representative held a seat and worked to increase coordination among early childhood education and other child and family support systems; and
- **Home Visiting Collaborative Leadership Council**
The representative served on the Council and provided strategic guidance to the County's home visiting network.

In addition to the above-noted activities, the Commission's representative continued to work

closely with the Office of Child Protection (OCP) and the County's Chief Information Officer to develop countywide prevention metrics.

Focus Area: Juvenile Justice

During this period of review, the Commission's Juvenile Justice (JJ) Committee began to explore the quality of services and supports that are provided to youth who remain at home under the Probation Department's community-based supervision. As part of this work, JJ Committee members met with Probation representatives, the executive director of the Probation Oversight Commission, and reviewed relevant data. A representative continued to serve on the Youth Justice Reimagined Advisory Committee and Data Subcommittee.

JJ Committee members also worked closely with the Third Supervisorial District to help inform several juvenile justice-related Board motions. On November 30th, a JJ Committee member provided testimony to the Board in support of the *Decarceration of Girls and Young Women: Addressing the Incarcerated Youth Population in the Los Angeles County Camps and Halls*³ motion, which passed unanimously.

Focus Area: Representative Participation

During this review period, Commissioners lent their experience and expertise to a number of additional efforts underway across the County by serving on the following bodies:

- **Domestic Violence + Child Welfare Work Group**

The DCFS and Domestic Violence Council-led Work Group brought together stakeholders with expertise in child welfare and domestic violence to develop an integrated strategy to improve policy, practice, and service provision to families impacted by domestic violence.

- **Education Coordinating Council**

The Education Coordinating Council (ECC) focused on monitoring services, such as tutoring, and access to devices, such as Chrome books, for systems-involved youth to identify and remove barriers to successful virtual instruction. The ECC also worked to increase access to school-based mental health and wellness services to DCFS and Probation-supervised youth.

- **Los Angeles County Faith-Based Collaborative**

The DCFS-led Faith-Based Collaborative brought together public sector, faith, and community-based partners for shared learning and collective stewardship of the LA County Faith-in-Motion model. This year, the collaborative focused on resolving communication barriers between DCFS and faith-based organizations, as well as establishing more effective ways to provide resources to and opportunities for service by faith-based organizations.

- **Los Angeles Family Urgent Response System (FURS) Advocates Work Group**

The cross-sector Work Group, co-led by DCFS and Children Now, focused on planning and implementation of FURS in Los Angeles County. FURS is a statewide and county-level system designed to provide youth and caregivers access to immediate, in-person crisis support to stabilize placements and prevent unnecessary calls to law enforcement.

- **Measure J Subcommittee on Housing #5**

The Measure J (now known as the Care First and Community Investment Program) Subcommittee #5 focused on developing and prioritizing recommendations⁵ for housing-related allocations of Care First and Community Investment Program funding. The subcommittee was particularly concerned with ensuring that community-based organizations and systems-involved youth were incorporated into the funding plan included on decision-making bodies.

- **Office of Child Protection Permanency Work Group**

The Work Group focused on identifying and implementing strategies to increase permanency for youth in foster care.

- **Short-Term Residential Therapeutic Program (STRTP) Task Force**

The Task Force was created in response to the fatal incident at Wayfinder STRTP, to examine systemic issues with STRTPs and

develop recommendations to improve the STRTP model, the County's continuum of care, and state-level policy, where possible.

- **Thriving Families, Safer Children Los Angeles Team**

The Team, led by Casey Family Programs, continued to focus on initiative development. During this period of review, visioning sessions were conducted with community members to help inform the planning.

- **Upfront Family Finding Research**

In May 2021, an advocate group submitted a letter to the Commission indicating that for a significant number of youth in foster care,

sufficient efforts to identify and place with relatives were not being made. In response to this concern, a Commissioner researched the matter, which subsequently led to the Commission submitting a September 27th letter⁴ to the Board urging Countywide expansion of the Upfront Family Finding Program and implementation of systematic tracking of all efforts made to engage and involve relatives of children entering care.

COMMISSION FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES MEETINGS IN 2021

Commission meetings are the primary vehicle through which information regarding pertinent topics within the Commission's purview is shared with Commissioners, the broader child welfare community, and other

stakeholders. Due to high levels of Commissioner attendance and engagement, 17 regular meetings were held during the reporting period. The topics of meeting presentations included:

- Family First Prevention Services Act Implementation in Los Angeles County
- Updates on Juvenile Courts from the Presiding Judge
- The Mental Health Impacts of COVID-19
- Thriving Families, Safer Children Initiative
- An Interview with Supervisor Kathryn Barger
- Meeting the Needs of Antelope Valley Families: *Antelope Valley Resource Infusion + Community Family Resource Center*
- Briefing on LA County's Work to Support Unaccompanied Children
- When We See Us' Brief by Brothers, Sons, Selves (BSS) Coalition
- Fostering Resilience Mentoring Program
- DCFS' Three-Year Budget Picture
- Department of Public Social Services (DPSS) Initiatives
- STRTP Task Force Final Report and Recommendations
- A Discussion on Helping Transition Age Youth (TAY) Thrive
- Upfront Family Finding
- DCFS' Risk Stratification Model
- Child Care Bridge Program
- LA County's Efforts to Alleviate Poverty
- Understanding Los Angeles County's Foster Care Placement Crisis and the Path Forward
- New Child Welfare-Related Laws

COMMISSION FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES REPRESENTATION ON BODIES IN 2021

	Dr. Wendy B. Smith
Education Coordinating Council	Dr. Jeanette Mann
Family First Prevention Services Act Planning and Implementation Work Groups Advisory Committee Policy and Training Practice Research and Continuous Quality Improvement Communications Community Pathway	Dr. Tamara Hunter Dr. Jeanette Mann Dr. Jacquelyn McCroskey Dr. Wendy B. Smith
First 5 LA Board of Commissioners	Dr. Jacquelyn McCroskey
Home Visiting Collaborative Leadership Council	Dr. Jacquelyn McCroskey
Juvenile Justice Ad Hoc Committee (Commission-Led)	Shimica Gaskins, Co-Chair Dr. Jacquelyn McCroskey, Co-Chair Maria Brenes Dr. Wendy B. Smith
Knowledge is Power Data Summit Design Team	Tiffany Boyd Charity Chandler-Cole Zaid Gayle Dr. Tamara N. Hunter Dr. Jacquelyn McCroskey Dr. Wendy B. Smith Steve Zimmer
Los Angeles County Faith-Based Collaborative	Dr. Tamara N. Hunter Dr. Jeanette Mann Lou Moore
Los Angeles Family Urgent Response System (FURS) Advocate Work Group	Dr. Tamara N. Hunter Dr. Wendy B. Smith
Los Angeles County Mandated Supporting Work Group	Tiffany Boyd Gale Caswell Charity Chandler-Cole Zaid Gayle Dr. Tamara N. Hunter Dr. Jeanette Mann Dr. Wendy B. Smith

Measure J Subcommittee on Housing	Dr. Jeanette Mann
Office of Child Protection Permanency Work Group	Dr. Wendy B. Smith
Policy Roundtable for Child Care and Development	Steve Zimmer Dr. Jacquelyn McCroskey (Alt.)
Racial Justice Committee (Commission-Led)	Charity Chandler-Cole, Co-Chair Zaid Gayle, Co-Chair Tiffany Boyd Maria Brenes Gale Caswell Shimica Gaskins Dr. Jeanette Mann Dr. Wendy B. Smith Franco Vega Steve Zimmer
Short-Term Residential Therapeutic Program (STRTP) Task Force	Wendy Garen Dr. Wendy B. Smith
Thriving Families, Safer Children Los Angeles Team	Tiffany Boyd Dr. Jacquelyn McCroskey
Youth Justice Reimagined Work Group Advisory Committee Data Subcommittee	Dr. Jacquelyn McCroskey

| Works Cited

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4. Countywide Expansion of the Upfront Family Finding program, Los Angeles County Commission for Children and Families, <http://file.lacounty.gov/SDSInter/bos/supdocs/164377.pdf>
5. Measure J Funding Recommendations, Measure J Housing Subcommittee, https://ceo.lacounty.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Housing_Approved-Subcommittee-Funding-Recommendation.pdf