



**LOS ANGELES COUNTY COMMISSION
FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES**
Celebrating 29 Years of Advocacy & Achievement

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February 13, 2014

To: Supervisor Don Knabe, Chairman
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From: Genevra Berger, Chair *Genevra Berger*
Los Angeles County Commission for Children and Families

RE: CHILD SEX TRAFFICKING

The Commission for Children and Families (Commission) urges the Board of Supervisors (Board) to ensure that adequate funding be designated for children who are victims of sex trafficking. To that end, the Commission believes it is essential that services for sex trafficking victims be included in the three-year Mental Health Services Act (MHSA) Plan that is being finalized now.

During the original MHSA Plan (Plan), sex trafficking was not in the forefront of public awareness and was not included by the Systems Leadership Team (SLT) in the previous three-year Plan. The Board needs to act to ensure that money is allocated to address the needs of this population both in providing prevention services and in offering mental health treatment and support opportunities to address the challenges faced by these young people.

A large number of youth involved in sex trafficking are children who have been involved in either the child welfare or probation system or in both systems. These youth have already suffered traumatic events in their lives by being separated from their families prior to involvement in sex trafficking. A great deal of mental health support is needed to restore these children's well-being, and to give them hope of a brighter future. Ongoing financing is available under the MHSA to provide this care, and the timing of the Board's focus could not be more propitious or urgent. The Department of Mental Health (DMH) and its SLT are currently deliberating on elements that should be put forward in the new MHSA Plan (Plan) for 2015-2018.

Those needing mental health support include:

- Children who have been detained and separated from their families because of sexual abuse and who are at-risk of later becoming a victim of sex trafficking.
- Transitional Age Youth (TAY) who are victims of sex trafficking and trying to find a safe place to restart their lives. Emergency and Specialized Housing with appropriate mental health services should be set aside under the MHSA for TAY programs. Domestic Violence shelters are an excellent family-like model that must be created for sex trafficking victims in need of on-going support.
- Runaways who are most vulnerable to being lured into child sex trafficking because of their susceptibility to promises of love and livelihood offered by traffickers. Mental health services should be provided to these at-risk youth to prevent their entrapment in sex trafficking.
- Girls who are arrested for assaulting their mothers as a result of fighting with their mothers on their involvement in sex trafficking. Both the mother and daughter should be provided mental health support. An alarming number of children involved are either in the child welfare system or the probation system, and are in need of coordinated mental health services to lessen future involvement.

In addition, DMH should strongly consider hiring survivors who have successfully separated from sex trafficking as peer support counselors. Community non-profits have identified this type of peer support as being very effective.

The Board has the authority and responsibility, under the amended MHSA, to adopt the Plan to be proposed by DMH. This process normally occurs after the Department has collaborated with the SLT, and provided the proposed Plan for public review and comment.

We urge your Board to communicate your support of creative funding allocations to meet the needs of these victims prior to submission of the proposed Plan. We note and commend your Board's recent action, providing \$200,000 for a two-year program to fight child sex trafficking.

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c: Chief Executive Officer
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