



## LOS ANGELES COUNTY COMMISSION FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

*Celebrating 36 Years of Advocacy & Achievement*

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September 27, 2021

TO: Supervisor Hilda L. Solis, Chair  
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FROM: Wendy Garen, Chair   
Los Angeles County Commission for Children and Families

SUBJECT: **COUNTYWIDE EXPANSION OF THE UPFRONT FAMILY FINDING PROGRAM**

Separation from family and placement in foster care, no matter the circumstances, can be traumatic and devastating to all parties. The need to feel connected to family is universal. In recognition of this, as well as the demonstrated value of the Upfront Family Finding program (UFF), your Board has passed two motions in the past five years regarding the program's establishment, piloting, and expansion. Because no child in our care should have to wait, the Commission for Children and Families respectfully urges your Board to direct the immediate implementation of UFF in all Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) regional offices to benefit all children and families, regardless of their zip code.

It is widely accepted and mandated by law (Welfare and Institutions Code § 309), that early identification of relatives is crucial to making successful relative placements. Further best practice and the law dictate that it is preferable to place children with relatives as the first placement, when possible and appropriate, with increased additional support from relatives who may not be able to foster, but do want to play a part in the child's life.

UFF, evaluated twice by Child Trends, has been found to produce positive outcomes with regard to earlier and greater family involvement and increased likelihood of adoption or legalized guardianship for children placed with relatives.

UFF aligns with the County's current efforts in several ways. First, the County rightfully emphasizes trauma-informed care and child well-being, including psychological health. The traumatic impact of placement in foster care can be greatly diminished by the sense of

connection and common bonds when children are placed with relatives. Even when placement with family is not possible, UFF can identify relatives who can provide loving and consistent support to the youth while in care.

A second area where UFF aligns with County priorities is the in reduction of racial disproportionality and disparity. Black children are disproportionately represented in out-of-home care and specifically, in congregate care settings. Implementation of UFF countywide can have a significant impact in addressing this disparity, and improve outcomes for other children of color. When children can remain in their geographic and cultural communities, there is less potential for feeling “othered” and more possibility of positive ethnic identity development.

Finally, with regard to the permanency that we all agree every child needs, and an issue that is of deep concern to your Board, UFF is proven to increase the likelihood of exiting the child welfare system to a forever home through adoption and legal guardianship regardless of where they live.

For these reasons, as well as our shared conviction that children under DCFS supervision deserve nothing short of what we would want for our own children, the Commission for Children and Families respectfully, and strongly urges your Board to direct DCFS, in collaboration with the Chief Executive Office, to identify funding and implement prioritized countywide expansion of UFF without delay. Two additional dimensions will support successful, accountable implementation: (1) training that increases workers’ recognition of the importance of relative engagement and connection, and (2) systematic tracking of all efforts made to engage and involve relatives of children entering care.

You may contact me at [garen@rmpf.org](mailto:garen@rmpf.org) or the Commission’s Executive Director Dr. Tamara N. Hunter at [huntet@dcfs.lacounty.gov](mailto:huntet@dcfs.lacounty.gov) with any questions.

c: Executive Officer, Board of Supervisors  
Chief Executive Officer  
County Counsel  
Director, Department of Children and Family Services  
Executive Director, Office of Child Protection  
Children’s Deputies

### *Our Mission*

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.