



Reductions to Child Welfare Services

The County of San Diego opposes the Governor's proposal to reduce child welfare services.

Issue:

Reductions in child welfare services and foster care grants will place the most vulnerable county residents – children – at greater risk of abuse and neglect.

Fiscal Impact:

- A loss of \$10 million to the County of San Diego as a result of the proposed across-the-board cuts to the Child Welfare Services (CWS) program.
- A local loss of approximately \$5 million to group homes and foster family agencies as a result of the proposed ten percent cut to foster care grants.

Background:

CWS provides protective services for children who have been abused or neglected. These children range in age from 0 -18 years. In FY 2007-08 in San Diego County alone, approximately 38,000 reports of suspected abuse and neglect were received on 71,000 children (includes siblings). Of these 71,000 children, 52,000 were assigned for investigation.

Some of the activities performed by CWS staff include:

- Investigation of suspected child abuse and neglect.
- Recruitment and training of foster and adoptive parents.
- Coordination of physical and mental health services for at risk and dependent children.
- Coordination and monitoring of parental compliance in reunification activities.
- Home and school visits to monitor children in placement.
- Attend multiple dependency hearings and prepare court reports for each case.

Child abuse and neglect has a profound and often long-term effect on a child's health, mental health and overall well-being. Abused and neglected children often have social and behavioral problems which require differing levels of care. To meet the child's specific needs, the County has developed a variety of placement options, from foster care homes to institutional settings, from temporary care to permanent adoption.

Each month in San Diego County, 7,400 children are under the supervision of child welfare staff. Of those, 4,900 are in out-of-home placements. Providers receive payment to cover the basic needs of these children in their care.

Service Impacts:

Across-the-Board Cuts:

The child welfare system is already critically under-funded. Cuts of the magnitude proposed in the Governor's May Revision would threaten the health and safety of California's abused and neglected children. Without adequate funding, investigation of high risk cases will be the first priority, response times will be slower and fewer cases will be investigated in a timely manner. A delay in response could result in an escalation of abuse and neglect for children already at risk.

A diminished ability to respond fully to all reports, due to inadequate funding, will leave more children vulnerable to emotional and physical injury and neglect. The proposed cuts will increase each social worker's caseload by approximately 30 percent. The increased workload could affect the County's ability to provide early intervention services, potentially increasing the need for higher, more costly, services. Additionally, the proposed cuts could result in higher costs to the state and counties as it will be increasingly difficult to meet federal outcomes, which would lead to financial penalties.

Group Home and Foster Family Agencies Foster Care Payment Reduction:

Foster family agencies and group homes provide services to children in need of a higher level of care than most foster families can provide. Rate reductions to these facilities could cause these service providers to go out of business.