

MENDOCINO COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS' RESPONSE TO GRAND JURY REPORT TITLED:

ANOTHER LOOK AT FAMILY AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES

The Mendocino County Board of Supervisors welcomes this opportunity to respond to the Grand Jury report titled Another Look at Family and Children's Services.

Pursuant to the request of the Grand Jury, the Board is responding to the following:

- F1. The loss of significant numbers of experienced staff since 2011 and the inability of the County to attract trained social workers with CPS experience has resulted in the hiring of inexperienced workers with a higher than normal turnover rate and a need for on-the-job training.

Partially disagree. The County has had a turnover of staff since 2011. This trend is not expected to continue with the changes made and more direct leadership currently being provided by the HHSA Chief Operations Officer and Director. The County only hires Social Workers who meet the minimum experience and education requirements. The BOS incorporates the responses by Human Resources and HHSA.

- F2. Mendocino County has a higher rate than the State average for removal of children from their families due to a lack of early intervention in troubled families, the drug culture, high unemployment, lack of housing, and the lack of teenage drug treatment programs.

Partially disagree. Mendocino County does have a higher rate than the State average for removal of children from their families. However, the reasons stated by the Grand Jury are only contributing factors in this problem and not solely responsible for the emergency removal due to abuse or neglect. That said, the BOS understands these factors can be detrimental to families and is working with HHSA and partners to address them. The BOS incorporates the response by HHSA.

- F3. Without more investigators and a five-day workweek, it will be impossible to meet the County's mandated response time for non-emergency ten-day investigation requests. This results in unnecessary risks for children.

Partially disagree. HHSA management is currently scheduling as they feel is most effective. As HHSA states, "[w]hen adequately staffed, HHSA will consider how to meet that expectation and continue to improve public office hours." The Board would welcome monthly updates on response times/statistics, staffing and challenges for HHSA Family and Children's Services and recommendations for improvement.

- F4. The new State eligibility requirements and training requirements for foster homes may reduce the rate of abuse and changes in foster care placements, but make it even harder for Mendocino County agencies to recruit foster families.

Partially disagree. This is speculation and the hope is that the rates of abuse will decline and foster families will be able and willing to comply with the new requirements. This will need to be evaluated after sufficient time has passed for an effect to be seen.

- F9. The change from the Merit System to Civil Service Employment practices allows promotion of experienced people without an MSW degree to supervisorial positions and this may attract new staff from neighboring counties.

Partially disagree. The change does allow for more local control. However, there were no changes to the requirements for Social Worker Supervisor. Therefore, we should be able to attract more staff from adjacent counties and they can progress without a master's degree but would need to obtain a master's for promotion to Supervisor. The BOS incorporates the HHSA response.

- F10. The use of the term *Social Worker* as a job title in the Department is too broad. It does not properly define the education or responsibility of the various workers' assignments.

Disagree. The term Social Worker as a job title is the industry standard. The job level classification from Social Worker I to Social Worker V clearly delineates the different experiences/requirements. In order to actively recruit across comparable counties the standard title of Social Worker is most beneficial.

- F11. The California State Waiver for staffing levels through 2018 will need to be renewed. Mendocino County is unable to maintain sufficient State mandated MSW staff levels.

Agree. While staffing has improved, FCS still does not currently meet staffing requirements. HHSA will submit a new waiver request in January 2018. The BOS incorporates the response by HHSA.

- F12. The Differential Response RFP is part of developing community based programs that will lessen the stress on the available staff of FCS by assisting families before problems become exigent and require removal of children.

Agree.

- F13. The disparity between Mendocino County's salary scale and adjacent counties' pay scales has made recruitment of workers with a MSW degree or years of CPS experience nearly impossible.

Partially disagree. The disparity of salaries between Mendocino and adjacent counties has made the recruitment more difficult. However, as referenced by Human Resources, some Social Workers with a MSW degree or CPS experience have been hired. Salaries continue to be evaluated for increases as the budget allows.

- F14. The Grand Jury notes management is seeking outside help to analyze and correct the Departmental issues. However, the problems noted in the 2014-15 Report still need corrective action.

Partially disagree. HHSA management has been working diligently to improve morale, increase training opportunities, improve response times and have an atmosphere of collaboration. HR has worked hard to fill vacancies since the 2014-15 report. The BOS has approved a pay increase of 3% for the next two years to include longevity pay and differential pay for certain areas. The BOS incorporates the HHSA response.

- F15. The Board of Supervisors agreed to many of the recommendations in the UC Davis report. The BOS increased salaries and awarded a 5% differential payment to Coastal and Covelo staff. The BOS also took action to reward long-term County service with longevity pay. The Grand Jury commends these changes and hopes the BOS will continue to support those committed to County service.

Agree.

Response to Recommendations:

- R1. The County require a commitment of continued employment for a fixed period of time for those participating in the County subsidized Master's Degree program. (F1, F5, F9, F11, F13)

The BOS will not be implementing this recommendation. There currently is no County subsidized Master's Degree program as noted by Human Resources.

- R2. The County request another State Waiver for FCS to operate with less than the mandatory number of staff with MSW degrees. (F1, F3, F5, F11)

This request has not yet been implemented but will be in the future. HHSA anticipates that FCS will not have the required number of Social Workers needed and submission of a new waiver in January of 2018 will be necessary.

- R3. The County continue to develop and utilize community-based non-profits to locate and assist families before exigent situations develop. (F1-F3, F7, F12, F14)

This recommendation has been implemented. The BOS incorporates the response by HHSA.

- R4. The Board of Supervisors direct the County to offer competitive salaries to hire and retain quality Department staff. (F1-F3, F5, F11, F13, F15)

This recommendation requires further analysis. While the BOS would like to have a Social Worker salary comparable to adjacent counties, the needs of other county employees and budgetary constraints must be taken into account.

- R5. The Board of Supervisors provide a side letter agreement to the SEIU contract authorizing additional pay for Emergency Response work. (F1-F3, F11, F13-F15)

This recommendation will not be implemented.

Per Human Resources: “[c]ounty employees currently receive pay for “on-call” hours as well as compensation for hours worked when responding to emergencies.”

While there are true stressors and significant impact created by Emergency Response work the best practice will be for the BOS to work with HHSA and HR leadership to determine proper scheduling, incentives and methods to minimize the secondary trauma to employees.