

News Release



Controller of the State of California - Kathleen Connell

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For Immediate Release

STATE CONTROLLER KATHLEEN CONNELL ANNOUNCES RESULTS OF HER FISCAL REVIEW OF THE FOSTER CARE PROGRAMS IN LOS ANGELES AND SACRAMENTO

Connell Concerned Foster Children Spend Unnecessary Months in Foster Care

Sacramento, CA, March 7, 2002 – State Controller Kathleen Connell today announced the results of her fiscal review of the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS), and the Sacramento County Department of Human Assistance (DHA).

The review noted several problems, most notably that neither county is complying with statutory requirements intended to move foster care children in a timely manner into a safe and permanent placement through reunification with their family or through termination of parental rights and adoption.

“Neither DCFS nor DHA has an effective tracking system for management to ensure that timely actions are taken and services are provided,” said the Controller. “Development of such a tracking system should be a priority for both counties to ensure that these issues are addressed.”

Currently a foster child can spend nearly three years receiving either reunification or adoption services. Unless a permanent placement takes place in this already long period, the child can be at risk for staying in foster care until he or she “ages out.” Such children are less likely to finish high school or go to college, and more likely to be unemployed or on welfare, be homeless, or at risk for out-of-wedlock births.

While the Controller’s findings did not require any return of funding, the failure to comply with statutory requirements may result in a loss of federal funding.

“This fall, the Federal Department of Health and Human Services will evaluate the performance of California’s child welfare services and foster care system against national standards, including reducing the time spent in foster care,” stated Connell. “If California fails to meet these standards, penalties ranging up to over \$5 million could result in the first year alone.”

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The DCFS review also noted that the tracking system produced late payments to foster care providers and in one case, duplicate payments of more than \$550,000 were made. In addition, the auditors found that almost 1% of the children in the foster care system are abducted and that agreements with foster family agencies may not be enforceable. The DHA report noted that problems with internal controls could lead to fraudulent payments.

Several factors led the Controller to call for the review, including recent media accounts of problems indicating funding may not be reaching the children within the foster care system, and grand jury reports recommending reform of the programs in Los Angeles County.

The Controller has sent a copy of both reviews to the California Department of Social Services, the state agency responsible for supervising foster care programs, requesting action be taken on the issues raised in both reviews and offering to consult on implementing recommendations.

Controller Connell also pledged her personal commitment to support reform of the child welfare program through a Foster Care Advocacy Committee she has formed made up of representatives from individuals, non-profit agencies and child advocacy groups. Many of these groups contacted the Controller's Office during the reviews to relate concerns about the foster care system, including the need for more mental health and drug abuse services.

"While there are many groups that are working hard to improve the child welfare program, I believe a combined effort would be even more effective," expressed Controller Connell. "We must work together in fighting for a better life for these vulnerable children."

***Copies of the Los Angeles and Sacramento Audit Reports may be obtained
by contacting Lisa Casalegno or Stacey Ragland at (916) 445-2636***

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