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Reply to: San Diego Sacramento

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March 22, 2011

The Honorable Charles Calderon
Majority Leader, California State Assembly
State Capitol, Room 319
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: Support and sponsorship for AB 1015 (Calderon)

Dear Majority Leader Calderon:

The Children's Advocacy Institute at the University of San Diego School of Law, which for over 20 years has worked to improve the well being of children in California through regulatory, legislative, and judicial advocacy, is pleased to support and co-sponsor your AB 1015, an important and common sense bill that will identify and implement county operational efficiencies and reforms benefitting abused and neglected foster children throughout the State.

With recent, sweeping budget cuts to child welfare and foster care, it is more important than ever for county social workers, boards of supervisors, counsel for foster children, and child welfare directors to identify and implement simple, day-in, day-out operational improvements that will reduce paperwork, enhance social worker productivity and job satisfaction, and help ensure that abused and neglected children are well looked after.

Two recent events underscore the usefulness of identifying such obvious operational reforms. In response to public controversy about Sacramento CPS services after multiple child deaths, Sacramento County hired an outside consultant to review its operations. The consultant identified a large number of extremely obvious operational improvements and efficiencies, benefitting social workers and children alike. For example, the Sacramento County report found:

The County's guidelines for its social workers contain 167 policies spanning more than 1,300 pages. Over 60 percent of these guidelines were last created or updated more than five years ago. CPS's existing guidelines include a mix of outdated or conflicting guidance, caused, for example, when the division created a new guideline without revoking or amending a prior guideline document related to the same procedure.¹

¹ The report can be found at: <http://www.news10.net/news/pdf/cps-report-032609.pdf>

Likewise, in response to news stories in Los Angeles County about child deaths, SEIU Local 721 authored an exhaustive and detailed set of recommendations for improving and streamlining daily operations and enhancing social worker productivity.

Critically, most of the suggestions offered in both reports can be implemented within existing resources. Suggestions included how to eliminate duplicative paperwork, improve coordination between departments and employees, and shift staffing to ensure greater productivity and job satisfaction, all to the enduring benefit of abused and neglected children.

Too often a serious conversation between stakeholders – especially including line social workers – about how they think CPS operations and their daily work lives can be improved occurs only after a tragic headline or gets subsumed into a vast, multi-year, system-wide review.

Such how-to-improve-your-work-conversations should be deep, collaborative and, most important, *ongoing*. We should always be striving to enhance operational efficiency to the benefit of children.

But when a local union must self-generate their own reform ideas and when an outside consultant is required to blow the whistle in an employee manual more than one thousand pages long, it is fair to infer that such operational conversations on mundane but potentially life-saving administrative matters are not occurring with the consistency, urgency and specificity our current budget climate and our abiding moral obligation to these children demand.

The best way to meet these challenges without micro-managing counties and their workers is simply by ensuring that all sides discuss these issues on an accountable deadline, air the recommendations in public, and “own” the recommendations that emerge as a result.

This is exactly what will happen as a result of your measure, improving the lives of California’s most vulnerable children.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ed Howard", written in a cursive style.

Ed Howard
Senior Counsel,
Children’s Advocacy Institute