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**CHILDREN'S ADVOCACY INSTITUTE'S REPLY TO
VENTURA COUNTY'S RESPONSE TO CAI'S JANUARY 2010 REPORT:
PROPOSITION 63: IS THE MHSA REACHING CALIFORNIA'S
TRANSITION AGE FOSTER YOUTH?**

July 13, 2010

On January 25, 2010, the Children's Advocacy Institute (CAI) issued a report titled, *Proposition 63: Is the Mental Health Services Act Reaching California's Transition Age Foster Youth?* The report can be found at www.caichildlaw.org.

In its Report, CAI graded each county on its use of Mental Health Services Act (MHSA or Prop. 63) funding to address the needs of its transition age foster youth (TAFY) population. CAI's report was based on the information that each county provided in its initial three-year MHSA Community Services and Supports (CSS) plan as approved by the Department of Mental Health. To supplement and update that information, CAI reached out to officials in each county¹ on at least three separate occasions, seeking information, clarification, and feedback. Based on the information CAI had available to it at the time of publication, Ventura County earned a total score of 32 out of 100, a grade of F.

In a memorandum dated April 9, 2010, the Director of Ventura County Behavioral Health, Meloney Roy, responded to the information contained in CAI's January 2010 report. Among other things, Ventura County provided information about two programs not included in the CAI report, the TAY ACT Community and the Transitions Program. While neither of these programs specifies TAFY as a priority population, TAFY may benefit from them nonetheless. Thus, in light of the information Ventura County has now provided, CAI has reassessed Ventura County's grade (see pp. 2-3). Additionally, CAI responds herein to Ventura County's specific allegations regarding CAI's report and findings:

CAI would like to commend Ventura County for expanding its capacity to serve Transition Age Youth (TAY) from 40 to 380. This is an impressive start. However, when CAI evaluated all counties' programs, the counties were evaluated not only for expansion of TAY capacity in general, but for expansion of comprehensive services to seriously mentally ill TAFY. As CAI specifically pointed out in its report, TAFY are a distinct population. As such, counties should create programs specifically to meet their unique needs — rather than simply naming them as one of several priority populations eligible for a general program designed for at risk TAY generally. Ventura County's response to CAI's rating criteria underscores the problem.

¹ Including Ventura County, which provided some clarifying information in a phone call on 6/03/2009, responding to an email sent by CAI on 4/22/2009 requesting information regarding Ventura County's tracking practices.

Review of CAI Rating Criteria: In light of the information Ventura County has provided, CAI has reassessed the County's grade as follows:

a) Criterion: TAFY Focus

Ventura County asserts that it has a continuum of mental health services and supports dedicated to serve TAY/TAFY.

Response: The purpose of this criterion was to examine whether or not the county had a program created solely and specifically for TAFY. Ventura County's response points to the programs the county has created for their general at-risk TAY population. CAI used this criterion because transition age foster youth are a unique population, distinct from other at-risk TAY populations, and counties should recognize this in their programs. In its response, Ventura County does not address this point. Because Ventura County has not used MHSA CSS funds to create a program *solely and specifically for TAFY*, the County continues to receive 0/10 points here.

Points: 0 / 10

b) Criterion: Priority Population

Ventura County asserts that unserved and underserved TAY, at risk of homelessness and with co-occurring disorders are a priority population. The County goes on to note that TAFY are not expressly named as a priority population.

Response: CAI gave points for this criterion if a county specifically named TAFY as a priority population. The fewer priority populations named along with TAFY, the more points a county would receive. The reasoning behind this scoring is that TAFY will have more of an opportunity to be accepted into and benefit from a program with a more narrow focus. CAI is very aware that TAFY are represented in other high risk TAY populations, particularly in the homeless population. Given their disproportionate representation in the homeless population, counties were given 40% pro-rata credit for including TAY who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless in their priority population. Thus, even though Ventura County did not explicitly include TAFY in the priority population, CAI recognized the fact that some TAFY would benefit by virtue of being a part of one of the named priority populations and gave Ventura County some credit for so including them. However, Ventura County lost points because they did not explicitly name TAFY as a priority population. Thus, the County continues to receive 5/20 points here.

Points: 5 / 20

c) Criterion: Capacity

Ventura County asserts that it has served at least 113 TAFY, far more than the number for which CAI gave the County credit.

Response: CAI examined the estimated capacity for each of the County programs — as estimated by the County itself — and compared this with the estimated need in the County. CAI relied on the numbers which the County included in its initial plan for its calculations, and then CAI contacted Ventura County to verify its data. Thus, the data contained in January 2010 Report was based on the data provided by Ventura County up until the time the Report was released.

Given the clarifying information that Ventura County has made available to CAI since the release of the Report, CAI has re-evaluated the capacity points Ventura County received, and will add 22 points to the 1 point the County originally received. This results in a capacity score of 23 / 35 for Ventura County.

In calculating this score, CAI gave more weight to capacity served by Full Service Partnership (FSP) programs (like the Transitions program) than to Drop-in Centers (like the TAY Wellness and Recovery Drop-In Center) because FSP programs provide more comprehensive services. CAI did not want to penalize counties that had comprehensive programs but perhaps served fewer youth. Further, it appeared that some counties count everyone who comes through the doors of a Drop-in Center as having been served while other counties count only those individuals that actually take part in a class or benefit from a linkage, for example, as having been served. Therefore, points for Drop-In Centers, which do not provide the same level of service as FSPs and for which counties appeared to have different means for determining capacity, are scored at 25% the points FSP programs receive.

It is important to note that CAI's estimate of need is based on an annual figure. For Ventura County, CAI estimated that 72 TAFY would qualify for MHSA CSS services *each year*. Ventura County's response indicates that it has used MHSA CSS funding to serve at least 113 TAFY *to date* (presumably since the first program started in December 2006). The County does not indicate the number of TAFY served by MHSA CSS funding annually. In recalculating the County's capacity score, CAI is generously assuming that all 113 TAFY were served by the County in the same year. However, 89 of these TAFY were served by the County's Drop-in Center, meriting 25% credit for those youth served (resulting in a total of 23 TAFY). Thus, 24 TAFY served by the Transitions and ACT programs plus 23 youth served by the Drop-in Center totals 47 youth served in one year.

Based on CAI's estimate that 72 TAFY would qualify for MHSA CSS services each year, by serving 47 TAFY with MHSA CSS services, Ventura County is meeting 65% of the estimated need in the County. Accordingly, the County will now receive 65% of the 35 points for this criterion, or 23 points.

Points: 23 / 35

d) Criterion: Sufficiency of Services

Ventura County asserts that CAI did not properly consider the existence of two programs: the TAY ACT Community and the Transitions Program.

Response: Ventura County is correct. CAI did not give the County appropriate credit for all of the services provided by these two programs, and we regret the oversight. CAI gave Ventura County credit for its Therapeutic Community Program FSP described in its Community Services and Supports Workplan, which has a very similar name and description to the TAY ACT Community Program referenced in Ventura County's response. The Therapeutic Community Program also contained a discussion and description of Transitions, thus Transitions appeared to be a part of that FSP. CAI erred in not giving appropriate credit for the programs' flexible funding component in Ventura County's initial grade. Therefore, Ventura County receives an additional five points for flexible funding for a total of 30 / 30 for the criterion "sufficiency of services."

Points: 30/30

e) **Criterion: Tracking**

Ventura County asserts that CAI did not properly consider the existence of two programs: the TAY ACT Community and the Transitions Program.

Response: The fifth and final criterion relates to tracking outcomes for TAFY. When evaluating the appropriate number of points to award a county for this criterion, CAI looked for several aspects such as: (1) whether the County tracks how many TAFY are taking part in its programs, (2) whether the county tracks if TAFY are successful after transition, and most importantly, (3) whether the county tracks outcomes longitudinally to see if the programs are having a long-term impact. Ventura County received one point for tracking the number of foster youth taking part in its programs. However, the information now provided by Ventura County indicates that it also tracks outcomes specific to foster youth in programs that serve TAFY. Therefore, Ventura County receives an additional point for this criterion.

Points: 2/5

Final Score Adjustment: CAI will modify Ventura County's score to reflect the information that Ventura County has now provided. The County now receives a score of **60/100 — for a grade of "D."**

SUMMARY

The additional information Ventura County provided to CAI demonstrates an improvement in its services for TAFY. However, there is still much room for the County to improve. It is encouraging that Ventura County is developing programs from which foster youth may benefit, though the County would have scored far better had it developed a program specifically for TAFY — or even specifically named TAFY as a priority population. Ventura County should be commended for increasing capacity in its TAY programs, thus serving more foster youth. The County's Full Service Partnership programs provide much needed services and the County's Drop-in Centers are a valuable tool, particularly in the area of engaging the TAY age-group.

CAI would encourage Ventura County to utilize future MHSA funding to develop programs solely and specifically for TAFY. The Prevention and Early Intervention and Innovation components of MHSA funding will provide the County with opportunities to create new programs to serve TAFY. These youth are the state's own children, and they deserve to be the first priority for funding, particularly in a time of severe economic hardships, such as the state is facing now. Finally, Ventura County should consider tracking the outcomes of its programs longitudinally, over 1–3 years or more to demonstrate the long-term impact of these programs and help not only to improve the services provided to TAFY in the future, but also to ensure that MHSA funding is being used in the most effective way possible.