

**Clerk of the Board**  
Florence H. Evans



**Board of Supervisors**  
Phil Serna, District 1  
Patrick Kennedy, District 2  
Rich Desmond, District 3  
Sue Frost, District 4  
Patrick Hume, District 5

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**County of Sacramento**

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October 1, 2024

The Honorable Bunmi Awoniyi, Presiding Judge  
Sacramento County Superior Court  
720 Ninth Street  
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: June 7, 2024, Grand Jury Report Related to the Care and Welfare of Foster Teens

Dear Judge Awoniyi,

Enclosed is a copy of the Sacramento County response to the June 7, 2024, Grand Jury Report titled, Grand Jury Report Related to the Care and Welfare of Foster Teens. The Board of Supervisors, during open session, on July 23, 2024, unanimously, with those members present, approved this report (Supervisor Frost was not present).

Please contact me if you have any questions at (916) 874-8150.

Respectfully,

Florence Evans, Clerk  
Board of Supervisors

FE:jc

cc: Ginger Durham, Jury Commissioner  
Erendira Tapia-Bouthillier, Grand Jury Coordinator

Enclosure: Executed copy of response to the June 7, 2024, Grand Jury Report

JUL 23 2024  
By Florence Ann  
Clerk of the Board

For the Agenda of:  
July 23, 2024  
Timed: 9:45 a.m.

To: Board of Supervisors

Through: David Villanueva, County Executive

From: Chevon Kothari, Deputy County Executive, Social Services

Subject: Response To The June 7, 2024, Grand Jury Report Related To The Care And Welfare Of Foster Teens

Districts: All

**RECOMMENDED ACTION**

1. Adopt this report as the Board of Supervisor's response to the June 7, 2024, Grand Jury Report, "Invisible Foster Teens: Where Are They?"
2. Direct the Clerk of the Board to forward a certified copy of the Board letter to the Presiding Judge of the Sacramento County Superior Court no later than September 5, 2024.

**BACKGROUND**

The Grand Jury reviews, makes inquiries, and investigates the performance of county, city, and local governing entities. Investigations of the operations of governmental entities can be initiated by the grand jury itself or suggested by citizens. A public report usually follows an investigation with findings and recommendations that must be publicly addressed within specified timeliness by a responding entity or person as prescribed in Penal Code Sections 933 and 933.05. Responses are then directed to the Presiding Judge of the Superior Court.

Responses to findings and recommendations must follow a specific format, outlined in Penal Code section 933.05, as provided below.

*...as to each grand jury finding, the responding person or entity shall indicate one of the following:*

- (1) The respondent agrees with the finding.*
- (2) The respondent disagrees wholly or partially with the finding, in which case the response shall specify the portion of the finding that is disputed and shall include an explanation of the reasons therefore.*

Response To The June 7, 2024, Grand Jury Report Related To The Care And Welfare of Foster Teens

Page 2

*...as to each grand jury recommendation, the responding person or entity shall report one of the following actions:*

*(1) The recommendation has been implemented, with a summary regarding the implemented action.*

*(2) The recommendation has not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future, with a timeframe for implementation.*

*(3) The recommendation requires further analysis, with an explanation and the scope and parameters of an analysis or study, and a timeframe for the matter to be prepared for discussion by the officer or head of the agency or department being investigated or reviewed, including the governing body of the public agency when applicable. This timeframe shall not exceed six months from the date of publication of the grand jury report.*

*(4) The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted or is not reasonable, with an explanation therefor.*

The Penal Code also outlines the extent to which either departments/agencies or governing bodies must respond to findings and recommendations:

*...the governing body of the public agency shall comment to the presiding judge of the superior court on the findings and recommendations pertaining to matters under the control of the governing body (933(c)).*

*...if a finding or recommendation of the grand jury addresses budgetary or personnel matters of a county agency or department headed by an elected officer, both the agency or department head and the board of supervisors shall respond if requested by the grand jury, but the response of the board of supervisors shall address only those budgetary or personnel matters over which it has some decision making authority. The response of the elected agency or department head shall address all aspects of the findings or recommendations affecting his or her agency or department (933.05(c)).*

The Grand Jury Report, "Invisible Foster Teens: Where Are They?" (Attachment 1) was issued on June 7, 2024. The report asserts that the County has largely failed to provide safe, permanent, appropriate, licensed housing for teens. The report includes six findings and eight recommendations related to the information in the report. The Findings indicate there was a failure to establish licensure of Temporary Shelter Care Facilities (TSCFs), lack of experience and staffing resources needed in operating TSCFs, potential exposure to harm, insufficient effort on making family placements, and lack of effective reporting and oversight of foster care conditions. Recommendations include presentation of a strategic plan for, and collaboration with and recruitment of, experienced and licensed outside agencies to operate TSCFs. In the interim, County-run Welcome Homes

should have staff with experience in congregate care and implement measures to minimize threats to foster teen safety. The report also recommends that CPS track and publicize important statistics related to teen foster youth and follow the policy on Family Finding to increase the number of teenagers placed with relatives. Finally, the report recommends the County Children's Coalition and the Child Protective System Oversight Committee make changes to allow for additional review and reporting.

The report includes required and invited responses to the findings and recommendations. The Board of Supervisors is required to respond to all findings and recommendations in the report within 90 days; therefore, the deadline to send responses to the Sacramento Superior Court is September 5, 2024. The Deputy County Executive of Social Services; the Director and Deputy Director of the Sacramento County Department of Child, Family, and Adult Services (DCFAS); and the Chair of the County Children's Coalition and the Child Protective System Oversight Committee are invited to respond to various findings and recommendations. There is no provision for invited responses and no specified deadline.

Proposed responses to all Findings and Recommendations are included in Attachment 2. The Board of Supervisors is requested to review the proposed responses and make any desired revisions. Any revisions to the responses will be brought back to the Board for review and approval at a subsequent meeting. Responses to the Findings and Recommendations must be sent to the Presiding Judge of the Superior Court by September 5, 2024.

### **FINANCIAL ANALYSIS**

Departments that contributed to this report absorbed related staff costs within their respective budgets.

Attachments:

ATT 1 - Grand Jury Report

ATT 2 - Response to Findings and Recommendations

CLERK OF SUPERIOR COURT  
BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

2024 JUN -7 AM 11:58



**SACRAMENTO COUNTY  
GRAND JURY**

**Steve Caruso  
Foreperson**

**Audrey Berotti**

**Lisa Brody**

**Satish Chand**

**Lesley Cummings**

**Akinola Dosunmu**

**Jeff Gregson**

**Richard Hernandez**

**Carrie Jackson-Harris**

**Joseph Jacobs**

**Alan Jong**

**Jeff Neczypor**

**Susan Oto**

**Jane Parsons**

**Janice Provost**

**Howard Schmidt**

**Timothy Shelley**

**Francina Stevenson**

**Elizabeth TenPas**

June 7, 2024

Sacramento County Board of Supervisors  
700 H Street, Suite 2450  
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Sacramento County Board of Supervisors,

Enclosed is the report entitled Invisible Foster Teens: Where Are They? issued by the Sacramento County Grand Jury. The Board of Supervisors has 90 days from the release of this report to deliver a response to this report. Your response should be mailed to:

The Honorable Bunmi Awoniyi  
Presiding Judge  
Sacramento County Superior Court  
720 9<sup>th</sup> Street  
Sacramento, CA 95814

Please also email a copy of your response to Ms. Erendira Tapia-Bouthillier, Grand Jury Coordinator, Sacramento County Superior Court at [TapiaE@saccourt.ca.gov](mailto:TapiaE@saccourt.ca.gov).

Penal Code section 933.05 requires that the responder must state whether the governing body agrees or disagrees with each finding. Disagreement with all or part of a finding must be explained. Further, the responder must state, with regard to each recommendation, the extent to which (1) the recommendation has been implemented, or (2) when it will be implemented, or (3) why the public entity will not implement the recommendation.

Respectfully yours,

*Steve Caruso*

Steve Caruso, Foreperson  
2023-2024 Sacramento County Grand Jury  
[carusos@saccourt.ca.gov](mailto:carusos@saccourt.ca.gov)

## INVISIBLE FOSTER TEENS: WHERE ARE THEY?



### SUMMARY

Sacramento County continues to fail – after many years – in its efforts to find safe permanent housing for foster teenagers who are housed in temporary facilities. These teenagers are virtually invisible because they are not a priority in Sacramento County's foster system.

In recent years, the County has housed these youth in a neighborhood with easy access to vice and crime, in office buildings with no kitchens or showers, and in a jail-like former youth detention facility.

Under the auspices of the County's Department of Child, Family and Adult Services (DCFAS), the Child Protective Services Division (CPS) bears the day-to-day responsibility to care for these teenagers but fails to meet its obligations. CPS abdicates its responsibility to these vulnerable unplaced foster teenagers who are entitled to a safe and secure living environment.

A County oversight committee, created to advise the Board of Supervisors (BOS), pays little or no attention to this festering problem. Ultimately, the BOS is responsible for these young people.

CPS's long-term lack of planning results in them being reactive instead of proactive in addressing the changes required by the 2015 Continuum of Care Reform (CCR) legislation. This state legislation brought sweeping changes to the foster care system.

The County's latest solution relies on three small "Welcome Homes" operated day-to-day by CPS that appear home-like and less institutional. However, these homes remain

unlicensed under state guidelines and continue to be an unsafe environment for foster teenagers and staff. To CPS's credit, the agency has recently opened a fourth home which is licensed and operated by an outside non-profit organization.

A move in the right direction, but these teenagers are still invisible.

## **BACKGROUND**

When a child must be removed from their family home for reasons such as abuse, abandonment, or neglect, the child's protection and welfare become the responsibility of foster care, a system supervised by the State of California and administered by the counties. In 2015, Assembly Bill (AB) 403, better known as Continuum of Care Reform (CCR), was signed into law. The legislation was designed to severely reduce the use of group homes and move the children into more home-like settings.

In Sacramento County, CPS is responsible for the temporary care and permanent placement of children in foster care. Within CPS, the Centralized Placement Services Unit (CPSU) performs intake interviews of children and tries to find permanent placement with relatives or resource families (previously known as foster homes).

On average, there are approximately 1,200 foster children under the protection of CPS. Most of these children are successfully placed in appropriate home-based settings. However, on any given night, 40 to 50 unplaced foster children are either temporarily housed by CPS or missing and labeled "Absent Without Leave" (AWOL). Those who are not AWOL are sheltered in unlicensed spaces. AWOL teenagers, on the other hand, have simply walked away from a shelter or home placement.

Finding a suitable home for these teenagers has been a challenge. Teenagers are less likely to be placed with resource families for a variety of reasons. For example, some carry past traumatic experiences along with normal adolescent behaviors. Resource families more readily accept younger children. In turn, teenagers prefer the company of their age group, so those that go AWOL communicate with their friends and often turn to couch-surfing or life on the street. CPS is required to look for these youth, and cell phone calls or texts may be the only contact for weeks. The teenagers may then just drop into the Welcome Homes.

Two provisions of the state's Foster Youth Bill of Rights, first enacted in 2005, enable this freedom of movement. It states that children shall not "be locked in any portion of their foster care placement" and they are allowed contact with their friends.

In April 2023, the local news media first reported the County's practice of housing foster children in cells in a former juvenile detention facility, in violation of state law.

In response, the Grand Jury investigated and discovered a series of unlicensed housing arrangements for teenagers, consisting of (1) a CPSU office, (2) an office building, (3) a former detention center, and (4) converted residential properties labeled by CPS as

“Welcome Homes.” Starting in 2016, and continuing to date, these County-run facilities have been operationally unsuitable for temporary sheltering of unplaced foster teenagers.

The Sacramento County Children’s Coalition (Coalition) was established by the BOS in October 1994 to provide advisory oversight on matters relating to children and families in the County, which includes foster care. The Grand Jury noted the Coalition did not focus on foster care, allowing these unacceptable conditions to exist for too long under their watch.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The Grand Jury’s investigation consisted of the following:

- Reviewed broadcast and print media reports.
- Performed 12 interviews, including employees of County and state government, attorneys representing foster children, labor representatives of County social workers, members of the Child Protective System Oversight Committee (Oversight Committee), and leadership from non-profit agencies.
- Examined documents including redacted incident reports, an agreement between the Youth Law Center and the County of Sacramento, and internally reported statistics.
- Visited four Welcome Homes.
- Viewed October 17, 2023, public meeting of the BOS, which included the Annual Report of the Oversight Committee and CPS’s response.
- Studied publicly available websites which provided background into the County’s foster care system.
- Reviewed agendas and minutes of the Coalition and Oversight Committee meetings.
- Reviewed California State law governing foster youth. The most critical legislation is Continuum of Care Reform and the Foster Care Bill of Rights

## **GLOSSARY**

<b>AWOL</b>	Absent Without Leave (missing)
<b>BOS</b>	Sacramento County Board of Supervisors
<b>CCR</b>	Continuum of Care Reform
<b>CDSS</b>	California Department of Social Services
<b>CPS</b>	Sacramento County Division of Child Protective Services



<b>CPSU</b>	Centralized Placement Services Unit within CPS
<b>CRH</b>	Children's Receiving Home
<b>DCFAS</b>	Sacramento County Department of Child, Family and Adult Services
<b>NREFM</b>	Non-Related Extended Family Members
<b>OB3</b>	Sacramento County Office Building 3
<b>STRTP</b>	Short-Term Residential Therapeutic Program
<b>TSCF</b>	Temporary Shelter Care Facility
<b>WET Center</b>	Warren E. Thornton Youth Center, a former Juvenile Detention Center
<b>YLC</b>	Youth Law Center

## DISCUSSION

AB 403 was signed into law in 2015. Better known as Continuum of Care Reform (CCR), the goal is to provide care and services to foster children with permanent placement in a home-based setting, preferably with a relative or Non-related Extended Family Members (NREFM). Under CCR, two types of temporary homes are authorized to provide care for the foster children, who are mostly teenagers, when permanent placement in a home is not immediately available or appropriate. CPSU triages these unplaced foster teenagers for temporary placement.

1. Unplaced foster teens with significant physical, emotional, or behavioral health needs may be assigned to a Short-Term Residential Therapeutic Program (STRTP). These facilities are designed to provide more intensive care and supervision of children than they would receive in traditional group homes. Examples of STRTPs being operated in Sacramento County are the Children's Receiving Home (CRH) and the Sacramento Children's Home, both non-profit organizations.
2. The other temporary shelter option is a Temporary Shelter Care Facility (TSCF), a home operated by the County or a private agency on the County's behalf that provides for 24-hour non-medical care for up to 10 consecutive calendar days. During this time, CPSU staff work to find placement with Relatives/NREFM or resource families. Although the law does not provide for stays beyond 10 days, the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) is aware circumstances may require stays of more than 10 days, accounted for as "overstays."

TSCFs are rare in the State of California. Statewide, there exists only 11 TSCFs in eight different counties. When the Grand Jury's investigation began, the Children's Receiving Home was the only TSCF in Sacramento County, but it did not accept teenagers. Interviews revealed the demand for temporary placement has exceeded the supply since CCR was implemented.

CPS used two different office locations for temporary shelter from 2016 through 2022. These facilities provided no privacy, no shower or kitchen facilities, no rooms or standard beds, and could never be considered "home-like." The offices were located in areas where sex trafficking was too easily accessible.

The County began looking for alternatives, and settled first on rehabilitating the Warren E. Thornton Youth Center (WET Center), a closed juvenile detention center. While this afforded some privacy along with showers and a gym, the beds were metal, rooms had wooden boxes placed over non-operational metal toilets, and the doors had glass windows. Meals had to be brought in because no kitchen facilities were available. Residents had to pass through metal detectors and security checks, and the Sacramento Sheriff's Office staffed a Deputy there 24/7. The atmosphere was more like a jail than a home.

In February 2023, the County began a Request for Proposals process to seek non-governmental licensed providers to operate what it called Welcome and Assessment Centers (later called Welcome Homes), which were to meet the licensing requirements for TSCFs. Responses were due back to CPS by March 2023, and no successful responses were received.

AT A GLANCE: CPS ATTEMPTS HOUSING OF UNPLACED FOSTER TEENS				
LOCATION	CPSU Intake Office	County Office Building (OB3)	WET Youth Center	Welcome Homes*
TIME	2016 - 2020	2020-2022	2022 -2023	2023 and continuing
LICENSURE STATUS	Unlicensed	Unlicensed	Unlicensed	Unlicensed
DESCRIPTION OF CONDITIONS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Violence</li> <li>• No beds</li> <li>• No showers</li> <li>• No kitchen</li> <li>• Sex trafficking</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: right;">- <a href="#">SF Chronicle</a></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Health and safety risk - CDSS</li> <li>• Unsafe conditions - Metro Fire</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Violence</li> <li>• Drugs</li> <li>• Alcohol</li> <li>• Sex trafficking</li> <li>• Jail-like conditions</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: right;">- <a href="#">Interviews</a></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Violence</li> <li>• Weapons</li> <li>• Drugs</li> <li>• Alcohol</li> <li>• Sex trafficking</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: right;">- <a href="#">Interviews</a></p>

\*Progress Ranch assumed operations of one of the Welcome Homes, with a TSCF license, in February 2024

In response to the media attention in April 2023 and a Youth Law Center (YLC) lawsuit final judgment requiring youth to be removed from the WET Center by June 16, 2023, the County changed its plan. They began to seek out three residential locations to serve as the Welcome Homes to house up to six teenagers each, with overflow cots available. The County filed applications with the state for TSCF licensure for each of the three properties. One year later, CPS still has not secured a license for any of the facilities, due to delays in obtaining complete background checks and health clearance for all staff.

Since 2016, unplaced foster teenagers have been temporarily housed in a series of inappropriate, unlicensed locations. Since the closure of group homes, as required by CCR, Sacramento County has proven incapable to secure a licensed County-run TSCF, let alone one that is safe and protected from violence, drug and alcohol use, and sex trafficking.

The unsafe and unstable living conditions apparent at all of the County-operated temporary shelters since 2016 make it abundantly clear CPS has been incapable of managing a TSCF within acceptable standards. This is not only the opinion of the Grand Jury, but opinions expressed in multiple interviews as well.

### Operation of Welcome Homes

Welcome Homes opened with round-the-clock personnel who were inadequately trained and prepared. Based upon the Grand Jury's investigation, including interviews and BOS agenda items, staff positions with the relevant skills were not established at the time. CPS relies on social workers, probation aides, and supervisors to step in, resulting in costly overtime pay.

Labor leaders reported employees have been subjected to harsh conditions, unclear procedures, physical abuse, and critical incidents involving teenagers, for which they have not been adequately prepared or trained. Moreover, due to the lack of preparedness, direction, and leadership, foster teenagers have been exposed to problems such as drugs, alcohol, physical abuse, truancy, and sex trafficking.

### Outside Operators

To CPS's credit, they successfully contracted with Progress Ranch to operate a fourth Welcome Home. Progress Ranch, a non-profit agency that specializes in foster care

services, secured licensure from the CDSS Division of Community Care Licensing in a matter of months, becoming fully operational in February 2024. CPS has been unable to accomplish this on any of the properties after nearly a year of trying.

Based on Grand Jury interviews, the collaboration with Progress Ranch has been positive. It seems a promising model for success in an arena historically plagued with frustration and failure.

CPS has also entered into an arrangement with CRH to remodel two bungalows on its campus, with the intent of using these as TSCFs. In interviews, CPS staff stated the smaller occupancy of the bungalows (4-6 each) and physical separation from younger children will provide a positive environment for teens.

CPS's strategy to recruit more professional agencies to operate the remaining Welcome Homes is encouraging. However, securing contracts with agencies takes time. Meanwhile, CPS must continue to provide care for these teenagers and should do so in a safe and healthful manner.

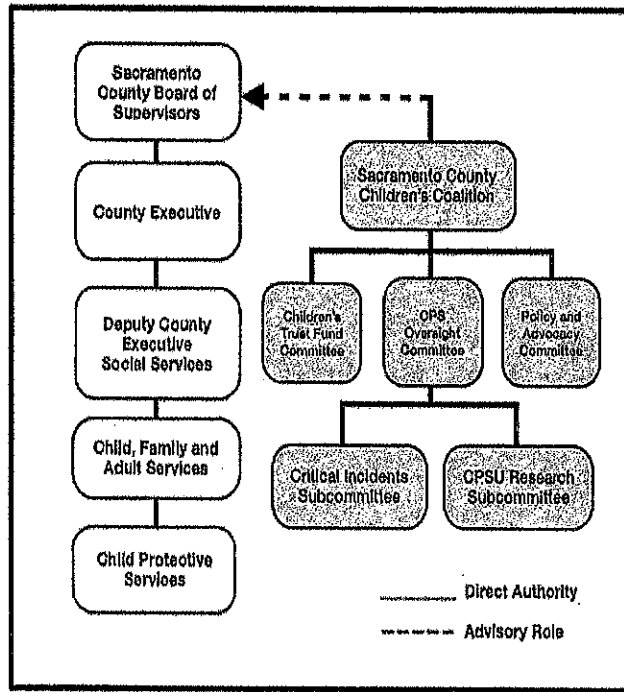
The Grand Jury recognizes that while CPS awaits licensure of the current Welcome Homes by CDSS, CPS should operate these homes in the same way they would if fully licensed.

CPS currently expends resources and energy in operating the Welcome Homes. Staff should focus more on applying the County's Family Finding policy to provide permanent placement for teenagers with relatives and NREFM. The University of San Diego Law School Children's Advocacy Institute reported in December 2023 that Sacramento County currently falls behind most major California counties in placing foster children with relatives/NREFM.

Oversight

The Sacramento County Children's Coalition (Coalition) is an advisory body appointed by the BOS on matters relating to the needs of children, youth, and families. The Coalition created the Child Protective Systems Oversight Committee (Oversight Committee) to examine and evaluate the efforts of all service providers that are part of child protective systems. The Coalition's Policy and Advocacy Committee recommends data-driven actions to improve social outcomes for the County's children.

The Grand Jury learned the issue of unplaced foster teenagers has been virtually invisible to the Oversight Committee. As early as 2017, the Oversight Committee was warned by CPS officials and the Coalition's Policy and Advocacy Committee that the loss of group homes would require alternatives for temporary shelter for foster teenagers. No investigation on how to provide new options was undertaken, so no recommendations were forthcoming from the Oversight Committee.



Reference Chart

When the WET Center activity appeared in the news and gained the attention of County leadership, the Oversight Committee then acted by creating the CPSU Research subcommittee to look into the matter. The two members of this subcommittee subsequently resigned from the Oversight Committee before making any report. With no specific individuals assigned to the investigation, it has devolved into a series of questions and answers between the Oversight Committee Chair and CPS management. The Oversight Committee's plans include making recommendations in their Annual

Report to the BOS, relying solely on information from the very organization they are investigating.

A deeper dive into the actions of the Oversight Committee revealed almost all of their attention was and has been focused on child abuse. The Oversight Committee's Critical Incidents subcommittee is mandated to review all Critical Incident Reports of maltreatment due to abuse or neglect. The Grand Jury recognizes that injury or death of children in Sacramento County warrants this level of attention, but so do foster children.

For years, the Oversight Committee of volunteer experts, community activists, medical and educational professionals, clergy, law enforcement, and helpful citizens appears to be unable to form a quorum at their meetings. They have been plagued with vacancies, no shows, and tired leadership. This reduces the effectiveness of their oversight.

### Conclusion

This Grand Jury investigation and report focused solely on foster teenagers that are awaiting placement in a home. For them, the foster system in Sacramento County is woefully broken. DCFAS fails to lead and CPS fails to serve. The BOS and their advisory group, the Coalition's Oversight Committee, do not recognize these failures.

The appalling conditions under which these teenagers have suffered have been widely publicized by media for years. Still the conditions continue. Now that these teenagers are no longer invisible, the County must act.

## **FINDINGS**

- F1 CPS has failed to establish a licensed County-operated TSCF, leaving unplaced foster teens without a safe, healthy, and comfortable home, as is required by the Foster Youth Bill of Rights. (R1)
- F2 CPS lacks practical experience, human resources, and commitment to operate TSCFs, and as a result have been unable to operate them successfully. (R2, R3)
- F3 CPS has failed to eliminate exposure to drug and alcohol use, possession of weapons, sex trafficking, and other threats around the County-operated Welcome Homes, leaving teenagers vulnerable and unsafe. (R4, R5)
- F4 CPS does not focus adequate effort on Family Finding, and as a result, falls behind most counties in placing foster children with relatives/NREFM. (R5, R6)
- F5 The Coalition does not require foster care conditions to be included in the Oversight Committee's Annual Report to the BOS, potentially leaving the BOS uninformed. (R7)
- F6 The Oversight Committee's failure to recognize and respond to CPS's inadequate efforts to shelter unplaced foster teens allowed the many years of unsafe, unhealthy, and unlicensed living conditions to continue. (R8)

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- R1 CPS should present a viable strategic plan to the BOS, no later than November 30, 2024, to recruit licensed and experienced agencies to operate the Welcome Homes as TSCFs, replacing the county-operated model. (F1)
- R2 CPS should continue to collaborate with outside operators, such as Progress Ranch and the Children's Receiving Home of Sacramento, to establish one or more licensed TSCFs operated on behalf of the County as soon as possible but no later than December 31, 2024. (F2)
- R3 So long as CPS continues to operate the Welcome Homes, they should be staffed with personnel with practical experience in congregate living environments as soon as possible but no later than December 31, 2024. (F2)
- R4 While the Welcome Homes are still in use, CPS should immediately implement stronger measures to eliminate drug and alcohol use, possession of weapons, sex trafficking, and other threats, but no later than September 30, 2024. (F3)
- R5 CPS reports should publicize statistics that state the number and type of incidents related to temporarily-sheltered foster children, the average daily census of all temporary shelters, and the number of AWOL foster children, and report these measures to the BOS in a public meeting on a quarterly basis starting no later than October 31, 2024. (F3, F4)
- R6 BOS should require that CPS rigorously follow the policy on Family Finding to increase the number of teenagers placed with relatives/NREFM no later than December 31, 2024. (F4)
- R7 The Coalition should amend Section 1.04 of its Bylaws to require a review of Foster Care equal in standing to Critical Incidents and to report annually to the BOS, no later than December 31, 2024. (F5)
- R8 The Oversight Committee should establish a monthly review of Foster Care, and include a report on CPS's progress in opening TSCFs, no later than December 31, 2024. (F6)

## REQUIRED RESPONSES

Pursuant to Penal Code sections 933 and 933.05, the Grand Jury requests responses as follows. From the following governing body of a public agency within 90 days, for all Findings and Recommendations:

Sacramento County Board of Supervisors  
700 H Street, Suite 2450  
Sacramento, CA 95814

**Mail or deliver a hard copy response to:**

The Honorable Bunmi Awoniyi  
Presiding Judge  
Sacramento County Superior Court  
720 9<sup>th</sup> Street  
Sacramento, CA 95814

**Please email a copy of the response to:**

Ms. Erendira Tapia-Bouthillier  
Sacramento County Superior Court  
Grand Jury Coordinator  
*Email: TapiaE@saccourt.ca.gov*

### INVITED RESPONSES

Chevon Kothari,  
Deputy County Executive  
Sacramento County Social Services  
700 H Street, Room 7650  
Sacramento, CA 95814  
(Findings 1-4, Recommendations 1-6)

Robin Banks-Guster, Chair  
Sacramento County Children's Coalition  
9750 Business Park Drive  
Sacramento, CA 95827  
(Findings 5-6, Recommendations 7-8)

Michelle Callejas, Director  
Sacramento County Department of  
Child, Family and Adult Services  
9750 Business Park Drive  
Sacramento, CA 95827  
(Findings 1-4, Recommendations 1-6)

Dr. Maynard Johnston, Chair  
Child Protective System  
Oversight Committee  
9700 Roseville Road  
North Highlands, CA 95660  
(Findings 5-6, Recommendations 7-8)

Melissa Lloyd, Deputy Director,  
Sacramento County Department of  
Child, Family and Adult Services  
Child Protective Services Division  
9750 Business Park Drive  
Sacramento, CA 95827  
(Findings 1-4, Recommendations 1-6)



2023 – 2024 Grand Jury of Sacramento County



SACRAMENTO COUNTY  
GRAND JURY

Acknowledgment of Receipt of Final Report

Steve Caruso  
Foreperson

Audrey Berotti

Lisa Brody

Satish Chand

Lesley Cummings

Akinola Dosunmu

Jeff Gregson

Richard Hernandez

Carrie Jackson-Harris

Joseph Jacobs

Alan Jong

Jeff Neczypor

Susan Oto

Jane Parsons

Janice Provost

Howard Schmidt

Timothy Shelley

Francina Stevenson

Elizabeth TenPas

I, Rachael Magavero, acknowledge receipt  
of **Invisible Foster Teens: Where Are They?** Grand Jury Final  
Report.

County of Sacramento  
Place of employment

[Handwritten Signature]  
Signature of Recipient

06/07/24  
Date of Delivery



**Response to Findings and Recommendations  
in the Grand Jury Report,  
Invisible Foster Teens: Where Are They?**

**Findings**

- F1 CPS has failed to establish a licensed County-operated TSCF, leaving unplaced foster teens without a safe, healthy, and comfortable home, as is required by the Foster Youth Bill of Rights. (R1)

Response: The Board of Supervisors disagrees wholly with the finding. The Department of Child, Family and Adult Services (DCFAS/Department) has been working closely with the California Department of Social Services (CDSS), Community Care Licensing (CCL) division since leasing the homes in June of 2023. CCL issued provisional Temporary Shelter Care Facility (TSCF) licenses for the Welcome Homes on May 31, 2024.

- F2 CPS lacks practical experience, human resources, and commitment to operate TSCFs, and as a result, has been unable to operate them successfully. (R2, R3)

Response: The Board of Supervisors disagrees partially with this finding. Historically, CPS has not operated a shelter or any other kind of congregate facility. However, the Board has allocated additional financial and human resources to support the successful operation of the Welcome Homes. Additionally, DCFAS has invested in various strategies to support our employees in providing care and supervision in the Welcome Homes. The Department hired a consultant to provide staff training on trauma-informed services and supports for youth awaiting placement at the Welcome Homes. Part 1 of de-escalation training was provided to staff in September of 2023 and the second part began in June 2024 and will continue up to September 2024. Self-defense training was offered in May and June 2024. Additional training is required by CDSS as a condition of being licensed. Some of those trainings have been completed, some will take place over the next few months and there are some that must be taken annually.

It is important to note that agencies with experience operating TSCFs and other congregate care facilities also face similar challenges noted in this report, even with extensive training and CDSS oversight. The youth we serve in these Welcome Homes are youth who have experienced significant levels of trauma throughout their lives which is why they are often not successful

stabilizing in our other placement settings.

- F3 CPS has failed to eliminate exposure to drug and alcohol use, possession of weapons, sex trafficking, and other threats around the County-operated Welcome Homes, leaving teenagers vulnerable and unsafe. (R4, R5)

Response: The Board of Supervisors disagrees partially with this finding because while these threats persist it is not reasonable to expect CPS in and of itself to completely eliminate drug and alcohol use, possession of weapons, sex trafficking, and other threats. These are challenges that face the community as a whole and require intervention by everyone who works with and support our youths, including families, law enforcement, behavioral health, education systems, and juvenile probation. Despite these collaborative efforts, this issue will remain a challenge not only for Sacramento County, but for all other entities that work with foster youth. Many of our youth have experienced extensive trauma and turn to substances to numb the pain. Sadly, while sex trafficking can occur in the general population, foster youth are more vulnerable to being sexually exploited.

CPS currently takes active measures to address these issues including but not limited to:

- Staff conduct inventory of youth belongings when they are placed in a Welcome Home and when they return after an elopement. Some youths carry knives (e.g., pocket knives, Swiss army knives, etc.) and state they need them while out in the community for their own protection. The majority hand them to staff when they enter the Welcome Home, and staff store them in a lock box.
- CPS worked with CCL to amend the Welcome Home plan of operation to include a "prudent parent" standard, allowing staff to conduct room searches when there is suspicion of drugs, alcohol or weapons.
- In addition to onsite security officers, DCFAS contracts with the Sacramento Sheriff's Department (SSD) to provide additional security for the Welcome Homes. SSD provides quick responses when staff call them about drugs, weapons and staff and youth safety issues.
- CPS works closely with community-based providers who specialize in serving kids who are being sexually exploited or at-risk of exploitation. They go to the Welcome Homes to engage youth and address their ongoing trauma. Some of our providers have been successful in helping our youths escape the world of sex trafficking.
- Behavioral Health Services provides substance use clinicians who also go into the homes, take kids off-site and educate them about the dangers of using drugs and alcohol. They also teach harm reduction

techniques, understanding many may struggle to stop using.

It is important to note that agencies with experience operating TSCFs and other congregate care facilities also face similar challenges noted in this report, even with extensive training and CDSS oversight. The youth we serve in these Welcome Homes are youth who have experienced significant levels of trauma throughout their lives, which is why they are often not successful stabilizing in our other placement settings.

- F4 CPS does not focus adequate effort on Family Finding, and as a result, falls behind most counties in placing foster children with relatives/NREFM. (R5, R6)

Response: The Board of Supervisors disagrees partially with this finding. While Sacramento County is lower than other counties on placing children with relatives, DCFAS launched a Kin-First Culture initiative in December 2023 to prioritize placing children with relatives while providing any needed support.

In addition to following the CPS Family Finding policy, the Department renewed its focus on relative placements in December of 2023. In partnership with Casey Family Programs, DCFAS is focusing on promoting a Kin-First culture that will help increase the number of foster children placed with relatives and increase support for relatives caring for their kin. Other partners in this effort include the California Department of Social Services, UC Davis Center for Excellence in Family Finding and Engagement, Think of Us, and Implematix. Supervisor Serna allocated funding to support our Kin-First Culture initiative.

The effort started with data clean-up and the development of a data integrity plan to ensure accurate data is entered into the Child Welfare Services Case Management System (CWS/CMS), as that system feeds into the statewide data hub, UC Berkeley's California Child Welfare Indicators Project.

Think of Us will also initiate "Kinship Sprints", which will include interviews and focus groups with child protective services staff, the Juvenile Dependency Court, Children's Law Center, County Counsel, and other partners in the work. The Kinship Sprints seek to identify policies, practices, systemic issues, and beliefs that may be impacting placement with relatives.

To support this effort, Sacramento County opted into the CDSS Excellence in Family Finding Engagement and Support (EFFES) program and submitted a plan to CDSS on May 23, 2024. The Department will use funding from EFFES to develop a specialized family finding model and will develop specialized

strategies for racial groups that are disproportionately represented in the child welfare system. The Department will also use the results from the Think of Us Kinship Sprints to develop a sustainable comprehensive approach to family finding that will improve relative engagement, increase relative placements and provide ongoing kinship support.

- F5 The Coalition does not require foster care conditions to be included in the Oversight Committee's Annual Report to the BOS, potentially leaving the BOS uninformed. (R7)

Response: The Board of Supervisors partially disagrees with this finding. While the Children's Coalition may not specifically require foster care conditions to be included in the CPS Oversight Committee's Annual Report, there is nothing precluding the Oversight Committee from including them. Additionally, the Board of Supervisors does not rely solely on the Oversight Committee to stay informed about issues regarding CPS and foster care.

Lastly, on September 26, 2023, the Board of Supervisors designated the Sacramento County Children's Coalition to serve as the Community Advisory Board once the Welcome Homes became licensed. Given that they are now licensed, the Children's Coalition will serve as the Welcome Home (TSCF) Community Advisory Board and will be required to report their findings and recommendations to the Board of Supervisors on an annual basis.

- F6 The Oversight Committee's failure to recognize and respond to CPS's inadequate efforts to shelter unplaced foster teens allowed the many years of unsafe, unhealthy, and unlicensed living conditions to continue. (R8)

Response: The Board of Supervisors disagrees wholly with this finding. The CPS Oversight Committee has been aware of the challenges with finding appropriate placements for foster youths with complex needs. The DCFAS director and CPS deputy director have also provided data and attended meetings to provide updates and progress being made on these challenges. There are a number of legislative changes and policies that have deeply impacted placement capacity across the state.

## Recommendations

- R1 CPS should present a viable strategic plan to the BOS, no later than November 30, 2024, to recruit licensed and experienced agencies to operate the Welcome Homes as TSCFs, replacing the county-operated model. (F1)

Response: This recommendation requires further analysis. A comprehensive strategic plan with specific strategies will be presented to the Board of Supervisors by November 30, 2024.

- R2 CPS should continue to collaborate with outside operators, such as Progress Ranch and the Children's Receiving Home of Sacramento, to establish one or more licensed TSCFs operated on behalf of the County as soon as possible but no later than December 31, 2024. (F2)

Response: This recommendation has been implemented. DCFAS and the Department of Health Services continue to work with community-based partners to create more local placement capacity that includes intensive mental health treatment services for foster youths with complex needs. The County's goal is to discontinue operating Welcome Homes as soon as possible. Progress Ranch is currently operating a licensed Welcome Home and in August 2024, the Children's Receiving Home will begin accepting up to 6 youth for placement in their TSCF. Since the Continuum of Care Reform was implemented, many congregate care providers have left the foster care placement business and either closed down or shifted their business model to another population. Additionally, CCR is focused on increasing home-based placements rather than shelter care placements, further dissuading interest in operating a TSCF. CPS will continue efforts to elicit interest from providers with experience to take over operations of the Welcome Homes, while also building more capacity in home-based and specialized settings, which will reduce the need for Welcome Homes.

- R3 So long as CPS continues to operate the Welcome Homes, they should be staffed with personnel with practical experience in congregate living environments as soon as possible but no later than December 31, 2024. (F2)

Response: The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not reasonable. While the County strives to hire employees with relevant experience in the settings in which they are working, there is currently a workforce shortage in the field of social work, especially for those seeking a career in child welfare. While the Department has hired staff that previously

worked in group homes, it is unreasonable to hire a full cadre of those with experience for each Welcome Home. The Board has allocated additional financial and human resources to support the operation of the Welcome Homes and social workers currently staffing the Welcome Homes were hired specifically for that assignment.

Additionally, DCFAS has invested in various strategies to equip our staff to provide care and supervision in the Welcome Homes. The Department hired a consultant to provide staff training on trauma-informed services and supports for youth awaiting placement at the Welcome Homes. Part 1 of de-escalation training was provided to staff in September of 2023 and the second part is scheduled in June and July of 2024. Self-defense training was offered in May, with more training sessions scheduled in June. Additional training is required by CDSS as part of being licensed. Some of those trainings have been completed, some will take place over the next few months and there are some that must be taken annually. As noted above, the goal is to eliminate the need for county-operated Welcome Homes.

- R4 While the Welcome Homes are still in use, CPS should immediately implement stronger measures to eliminate drug and alcohol use, possession of weapons, sex trafficking, and other threats, but no later than September 30, 2024. (F3)

Response: This recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted or reasonable. The Department has measures in place to address the issue, but it is not reasonable to expect CPS in and of itself to completely eliminate drug and alcohol use, possession of weapons, sex trafficking, and other threats. These are challenges that face the community as a whole and require intervention by everyone who works with and supports our youths including families, law enforcement, behavioral health, education systems, and probation. Despite these collaborative efforts, this issue will remain a challenge not only for Sacramento County but for all other entities that work with foster youth. Many of our youth have experienced extensive trauma and turn to substances to numb the pain. Sadly, while sex trafficking can occur in the general population, foster youth are more vulnerable to being sexually exploited.

CPS currently takes active measures to address these issues including but not limited to:

- Staff conduct inventory of youth belongings when they are placed in a Welcome Home and when they return after an elopement. Many youths carry knives (e.g., pocket knives, Swiss army knives, etc.) and state

they need them while out in the community for their own protection. The majority hand them to staff when they enter the Welcome Home, and staff store them in a lock box.

- CPS worked with CCL to amend the Welcome Home program statement to include a “prudent parent” standard, allowing staff to conduct room searches when there is suspicion of drugs, alcohol or weapons.
- In addition to an onsite security officer, DCFAS contracts with the Sacramento Sheriff’s Department to provide additional security for the Welcome Homes. SSD provides quick responses when staff call them about drugs, weapons and staff or youth safety issues.
- CPS works closely with community-based providers who specialize in serving kids who are being sexually exploited or at-risk of exploitation. They go to the Welcome Homes to engage youth and address their ongoing trauma. Some of our providers have been successful in helping our youths get out of the world of sex trafficking.
- Behavioral Health Services provides substance use clinicians who also go into the homes, take kids off-site and educate them about the dangers of using drugs and alcohol. They also teach harm reduction techniques, understanding many aren’t going to quit using.

It is important to note that agencies with experience operating TSCFs and other congregate care facilities also face similar challenges noted in this report, even with extensive training and CDSS oversight. The youth we serve in these Welcome Homes are young people who have experienced significant levels of trauma throughout their lives which is why they are often not successful stabilizing in our other placement settings.

- R5 CPS reports should publicize statistics that state the number and type of incidents related to temporarily sheltered foster children, the average daily census of all temporary shelters, and the number of AWOL foster children, and report these measures to the BOS in a public meeting on a quarterly basis starting no later than October 31, 2024. (F3, F4)

Response: This recommendation has been implemented. Under the licensing requirements for a TSCF, the BOS, which serves as the governing body for the TSCF, must hold quarterly meetings (HSC Section 1520.1(f).) At these meetings, the governing body shall review and discuss licensing reports (e.g., Complaint Reports and Facility Evaluation Reports), financial and program audit reports, incident reports filed by the facility with Community Care Licensing, and any administrative action against the licensee or its employees. Based on its review, the governing body must ensure that the facility complies with all applicable regulations. The daily census and number of youths away from placement will be included. The first quarterly meeting will occur prior

to October 31, 2024.

- R6 BOS should require that CPS rigorously follow the policy on Family Finding to increase the number of teenagers placed with relatives/NREFM no later than December 31, 2024. (F4)

Response: This recommendation has been and continues to be implemented. In addition to following the CPS Family Finding policy, the Department renewed its focus on relative placements in December of 2023. In partnership with Casey Family Programs, DCFAS is focusing on promoting a Kin-First culture that will help increase the number of foster children placed with relatives and increase support for relatives caring for their kin. Other partners in this effort include the California Department of Social Services, UC Davis Center for Excellence in Family Finding and Engagement, Think of Us, and Implematix. Supervisor Serna allocated funding to support our Kin-First Culture initiative.

The effort started with data clean-up and the development of a data integrity plan to ensure accurate data is entered into the Child Welfare Services Case Management System (CWS/CMS), as that system feeds into the statewide data hub, UC Berkeley's California Child Welfare Indicators Project.

Think of Us will also initiate "Kinship Sprints", which will include interviews and focus groups with child protective services staff, the Juvenile Dependency Court, Children's Law Center, County Counsel, and other partners in the work. The Kinship Sprints seek to identify policies, practices, systemic issues, and beliefs that may be impacting placement with relatives.

To support this effort, Sacramento County opted into the CDSS Excellence in Family Finding Engagement and Support (EFFES) program and submitted a plan to CDSS on May 23, 2024. The Department will use funding from EFFES to develop a specialized family finding model and will develop specialized strategies for racial groups that are disproportionately represented in the child welfare system. The Department will also use the results from the Think of Us Kinship Sprints to develop a sustainable comprehensive approach to family finding that will improve relative engagement, increase relative placements and provide ongoing kinship supports.

- R7 The Coalition should amend Section 1.04 of its Bylaws to require a review of Foster Care equal in standing to Critical Incidents and to report annually to the BOS, no later than December 31, 2024. (F5)



Response: This recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted. The Bylaws state the Coalition is to advocate for integrated service planning and delivery to promote good health and well-being of children and families in Sacramento County, which includes children and families involved with child welfare. Additionally, their charge is to make recommendations to the Board of Supervisors about budget and policy issues pertaining to the needs and services of children and families in Sacramento County, which includes children in foster care and their families.

More specifically, on September 26, 2023, the Board of Supervisors designated the Sacramento County Children's Coalition to serve as the Community Advisory Board once the Welcome Homes became licensed. Given that they are now licensed, the Children's Coalition will serve as the Welcome Home (TSCF) Community Advisory Board and must report their findings and recommendations to the Board of Supervisors on an annual basis.

- R8 The Oversight Committee should establish a monthly review of Foster Care and include a report on CPS's progress in opening TSCFs, no later than December 31, 2024. (F6)

Response: This recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted. Under the licensing requirements for a TSCF, the BOS, which serves as the governing body for the TSCF, must hold quarterly meetings (HSC Section 1520.1(f).) At these meetings, the governing body shall review and discuss licensing reports (e.g., Complaint Reports and Facility Evaluation Reports), financial and program audit reports, incident reports filed by the facility with Community Care Licensing, and any administrative action against the licensee or its employees. Based on its review, the governing body must ensure that the facility complies with all applicable regulations. The daily census and number of youths away from placement will be included. The first quarterly meeting will occur prior to October 31, 2024.