



March 28, 2017

To: The Honorable Joaquin Arambula
Chair, Assembly Budget Subcommittee No. 1

Honorable Members
Assembly Budget Subcommittee No. 1

From: Frank J. Mecca, Executive Director

**RE: PSYCHOTROPIC MEDICATION REVIEW –
SUPPORT NATIONAL CENTER FOR YOUTH LAW
REQUEST**

The County Welfare Directors Association of California (CWDA) supports the National Center for Youth Law (NCYL) request for \$80,025 General Fund to establish a centralized psychotropic medication review for children in foster care. By leveraging a 75 percent federal match, this budget request would bring in \$240,075 additional federal funds each year to ensure California's foster children only receive psychotropic medications that are appropriate and medically necessary.

More than 9,500 California foster children – about one-quarter of foster youth between ages 6 and 18 – receive psychotropic medications. A 2016 state audit found that the current administration of psychotropic medication to children in foster care lacks adequate oversight, leading to the potential over-prescription of psychotropic medications, which can have significant health consequences. The audit recommended that the state and counties establish a process closely monitor requests for authorizations that exceed the state dosage and multiple-medication guidelines, and subsequently check-in with the prescribers of these medications to verify their medical necessary. Legislation was subsequently passed to support the audit recommendations, including SB 238 (Mitchell, Statutes of 2015), a bill co-sponsored by CWDA and NCYL.

The NCYL request of \$80,025 General Fund per year would enhance these existing oversight mechanisms by creating a centralized medical review of the prescriptions that fall outside of the prescribing guidelines for children in foster care. This centralized review would be conducted by a trauma-informed and trained child and adolescent psychiatrist to assist the counties and courts in making informed decisions regarding the authorization of psychotropic and anti-psychotics, consistent with statewide guidelines. This centralized

function has been cited as a best practice in other states and can be a valuable resource for child welfare staff and the courts, particularly in smaller and more rural counties where child psychiatrists may be difficult to recruit and retain.

For these reasons, we urge your subcommittee to support the NCYL budget proposal of \$80,025 General Fund for psychotropic medication review for children in foster care.

- cc: Agnes Lee, Office of the Assembly Speaker
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