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March 6, 2006

To: The Honorable Hector De La Torre
Chairman, Assembly Budget Subcommittee No. 1

Honorable Members
Assembly Budget Subcommittee No. 1

From: Frank J. Mecca, Executive Director

**Re: Child Welfare Program Improvement Efforts -
SUPPORT IMPROVEMENT FUND; AUGMENT
FUNDING**

The County Welfare Directors Association of California (CWDA) respectfully recommends an increase of \$5 million General Fund for the Child Welfare Services Outcome Improvement Project.

The child welfare outcome measures created as a result of AB 636 (Steinberg, Statutes of 2001) established an effective framework for counties to examine their child welfare services performance over time and develop system improvement plans. Counties have tackled those areas that could be addressed through changes in practice and redirection of existing resources. Initial appropriations, philanthropy and grants from organizations such as local First 5 commissions have funded some of the initiatives that require additional resources to implement. However, the expansion of initial efforts and implementation of other enhancements still await funding.

The \$12.9 million total funds appropriated in 2005-6 provided counties with seed money to begin addressing areas that require additional resources. Those funds were fully allocated to counties, leaving \$3.5 million in proposals that were unfunded or under-funded. The 2005/06 proposals represent only a small portion of the total need. Counties were very conservative in submitting proposals given the limited funds available in this first year. An additional \$13.7 million was provided in the current year to continue pilot activities in 11 counties to test the viability of three initiatives: standardized safety assessment, Differential Response and improving stability for foster children while in care.

Early results indicate that counties are on the right track. Data produced by the UC Berkeley Child Welfare Performance Indicators Project shows that counties are making positive progress on most measures. The number of children in foster care has dropped without compromising child safety. Children who do enter foster care are now leaving care more quickly to return to their families or to adoption. The recurrence of child abuse or neglect has decreased slightly, while re-entry rates have also declined.

Counties are ready to take child welfare improvement to the next level. Promising initial efforts show that additional resources can be effectively used to improve services. Small, targeted Differential Response projects are proving effective in identifying families that can benefit from early intervention. Multidisciplinary team case management is improving placement stability. Including family members and youth in case decision-making is leading to better outcomes.

An infusion of additional funds would allow counties to continue current efforts, as well as expand in areas where current efforts point toward improved outcomes for children and families. Additional counties could implement Differential Response projects; others could expand current targeted efforts to a greater number of families. More counties could initiate or expand multi-disciplinary teams, which bring community organizations together with family members to build a coordinated set of services to meet a family's unique needs. Supports could be expanded for Foster Parents and relative to improve placement stability. Counties will be able to develop promising initiatives tailored for their communities.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have questions regarding our position.

cc: Christian Griffith, Consultant, Assembly Budget Committee
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