




CWDA

February 27, 2014

To: The Honorable Shirley Weber, Chair
Assembly Budget Subcommittee No. 1

Honorable Members, Assembly Budget Subcommittee No. 1
From:  Frank J. Mecca, Executive Director

RE: **Child Welfare Services: Services to Child Victims of
Commercial Sexual Exploitation (CSEC)**

The County Welfare Directors Association of California (CWDA) respectfully requests your consideration of a budget item to build capacity in local child welfare agencies to serve child victims of commercial sexual exploitation. Targeted resources are needed to combat this heinous crime against our most vulnerable children and to effectively serve the critical needs of this unique population through California's child welfare services (CWS) system. We respectfully request discussion on this issue at an upcoming Subcommittee hearing to build common understanding and identify the resources necessary to serve this population.

Commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC) is an emerging national and statewide epidemic that deserves our highest attention. Various studies have pointed to the fact that many CSEC victims have had prior involvement with the CWS, and some have been recruited while being in the foster care system. In addition, three of the top ten highest trafficking areas in the nation are right here in California: San Francisco, Los Angeles and San Diego metropolitan areas. There is a strong belief that child welfare should have a primary responsibility for protecting and serving these children and for coordinating services. This belief stems from the fact that these are children in need of protection from sexual exploitation, many of whom have had some prior contact with the child welfare or foster care systems. There is also a growing sentiment against labeling and treating CSEC victims as criminals served primarily through the delinquency system. The California Child Welfare Council recently articulated the significant role that child welfare agencies should have and convened a CSEC Action Team to explore strategies for addressing this issue through the child welfare system.

CSEC is a complex problem that requires a comprehensive solution. While some county child welfare agency have made strides to serve this population, these counties have also taken years to build up their resources and collaborative processes. Meanwhile, this problem continues to grow and spread across the counties. CWDA has worked with both county child welfare agencies and community agencies serving CSEC victims to understand this epidemic and identify statewide solutions. We believe resources should be targeted to three specific deliverables: prevention, intervention and direct services.

Prevention: Prevention services include education of our foster youth as well as training for foster care providers to prevent exploitation. Children in the foster care may be particularly vulnerable to victimization due to their history of trauma and for this reason, it is also important that all social work staff receive training on identification of CSEC and appropriate case management services.

Intervention: Due to the extensive trauma and violence experienced by CSEC victims, services must be tailored to meet their individual needs, working collaboratively with other systems including CSEC survivors and advocates, domestic violence providers, mental health, law enforcement, and others to leverage resources. This epidemic can be seen throughout California and for this reason, effective intervention requires that CWS agencies coordinate with other systems to leverage these resources. Additional tools are specifically needed in the large, urban counties where the incidence of CSEC is higher.

Services: Finally, access to appropriate supports and services tailored to this population is critically important. All counties currently lack capacity to provide enhanced supervision and support to protect victims through the regular foster care program. CSEC victims have immediate needs for clothing and safe shelter away from their abusing pimps, and require long-term services so that CSEC victims can safely return to their family, school and community.

To address this need, CWDA has identified the costs for these three critical elements—prevention, intervention and services—equal to \$20.3 million General Funds in the first year (fiscal year 2014-15), which can be matched 50% federal Title IVE funding. This initial outlay includes some one-time costs of developing curriculum and training for foster youth, caregivers and social workers. We anticipate that the on-going costs would equal \$14.3 million General Funds, which can be leveraged with federal funds for on-going coordination, case management, and direct services.

Public awareness in society and in the courts have resulted in a higher demand for services from the child welfare system to combat this epidemic. This higher degree of services from CWS was never contemplated in the 2011 realignment of the child welfare and foster care programs. This requires that additional resources be committed to enable CWS agencies to serve this population.

We thank you for your consideration of this important matter and we look forward to working with you to strategize solutions to better serve CSEC victims.

Attachment: CWDA CSEC Fact Sheet

cc: Gail Gronert, Office of the Assembly Speaker
Chris Woods, Office of the Assembly Speaker
Nicole Vazquez, Assembly Budget Subcommittee No. 1
Julie Souliere, Assembly Republican Fiscal Consultant
Michael Wilkening, Health and Human Services Agency
Matt Paulin, Department of Finance
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CWDA

BUDGET FACT SHEET
Serving Child Victims of Commercial Sexual Exploitation

Prepared by the County Welfare Directors Association of California (CWDA)

Purpose:

Nationally, the plight of commercially sexually exploited children (CSEC) has gained the attention of child serving agencies and policy makers. Importantly, this has shed light on suffering these children experience and the challenges we face in California to serve this unique population. The majority of child sexual exploitation victims have suffered extensive abuse and trauma, and many have been in some contact with the child welfare system.

Background:

California's child welfare system is ill-equipped to respond to the needs to protect and serve child victims of commercial sexual exploitation. In many respects these victims are like other children that counties serve in its child welfare system, but also have unique needs that require coordination and support from other systems – including mental health, public health, law enforcement, community providers and probation.

Responding to CSEC requires a multi-pronged response that includes prevention, intervention and after care. California's child welfare agencies currently lack the tools and the resources to adequately serve and protect victims of this heinous crime. The tools and resource needed by child welfare agencies to combat commercial sexual exploitation of children include the following:

Prevention: Training for all child welfare workers, foster caregivers (foster homes and group homes), and youth to recognize the signs of sexual exploitation and trauma, determine if a youth is risk for commercial sexual exploitation, train on strategies and offer tools to avoid victimization.

Intervention: Support for collaborative and integrated efforts both internally within the child welfare agency and externally with community partners, though the following strategies:

- **Child Welfare Worker Training:** Rescuing and supporting CSEC requires specialized skills and training for social workers to ensure child victims remain safe and feel supported in their recovery.
- **Child Welfare Worker Staffing:** In the twelve largest counties, several of which include areas where commercial sex trafficking of children is most prevalent, additional social workers are needed who are trained and specialized to do intensive work with victims of commercial sex

Three of the nation's top thirteen high intensity child prostitution areas are located here in California: San Francisco, Los Angeles and San Diego metropolitan areas. However, victims of commercial sex trafficking are seen all throughout California, as children are transported along major freeways and across state borders. As a result, child welfare agencies across the state are struggling to address this epidemic.

trafficking (and those at high risk). These workers should have reduced caseloads to provide greater support to victims and their caregivers. They would lead case management activities within a team of community-based and county service providers.

- **Partnership with Survivors:** Effective intervention efforts in many jurisdictions across the state and nation rely on partnerships with survivor-led groups to reach out to youth on the street to engage youth and help them escape.
- **Systems Coordination:** Intervention must be multi-faceted to address victim's physical and emotional needs. Rapid response is required to bring victims to safety, meet their immediate needs, and link to long-term services. County child welfare agencies can take a leadership role by identifying coordinators in each county to pull together resources for rapid response activities as well as ensure tracking of the incidence and outcomes for CSEC.

Services: Child victims of commercial sexual exploitation have experienced a brutal environment where the pimp controlled everything, and left the victim with nothing of their own belongings. Once rescued, victims have an immediate need for their own clothing, toiletries, safe housing, and care. Specialized foster care rates (i.e. rate supplemental) are needed to ensure that the board and care provided in foster care meet the needs of the victim and can support their recovery. This includes immediate needs for basic necessities and enhanced supervision to prevent running away, and longer-term needs for support the youth in re-engaging in school, re-establishing connection to family, and supporting the youth's development of healthy relationships.

Proposed Solution:

Increase funding support to enable county child welfare agencies to serve child victims of commercial sexual exploitation. Provide total first-year funding of \$40.6 million (\$20.3 million GF), and \$28.5m (\$14.3m GF) annually thereafter. Initial one-time costs include the cost of developing curriculum and training all foster youth, foster caregivers and child welfare staff.

For More Information:

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