



County of San Diego

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COUNTY GRAND JURY

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December 5, 2017

Foreman Jeff Bryson
San Diego Grand Jury
330 W. Broadway, 477
San Diego, CA 92101

Dear Mr. Bryson,

In response to the 2016-2017 Grand Jury Report “\$353 MILLION COUNTY FOSTER CARE BUDGET: WHERE ARE THE MEASURABLE OUTCOMES?”, recommendations 17-53 and 17-54 required further analysis. A summary of this analysis is below.

The 2016-2017 Grand Jury Recommendation 17-53 to the Health and Human Services Agency and the Health and Human Services Agency’s complete response is below:

17-53: Reduce HHSA welfare cost by foster care alumni through a cooperative effort with a local university with the mandate to conduct a longitudinal research effort to determine the effectiveness of CWS policies and programs contributing to successful foster care alumni.

Response: This recommendation requires further analysis. By December 1, 2017, the County of San Diego HHSA CWS will conduct fiscal analyses, as well as explore the legal authority to conduct studies involving former foster youth. The activities may include:

- Securing a plan to obtain written consent from foster youth authorizing periodic follow up, once they leave the system;
- Exploration of existing research agencies, including educational institutions, who may serve as strong research partners for this recommended effort;
- Exploration of funding opportunities.

Since July 2017, the County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency, Child Welfare Services (CWS) has conducted analyses of current and potential research possibilities that could

explore the effectiveness of CWS policies and programs contributing to successful foster care alumni. Based on current research efforts to assess outcomes of transitioning foster youth, it does not appear necessary to enter into another longitudinal study at this time.

Evaluation efforts are currently being conducted nationwide to shape policy changes in order to improve outcomes for all foster youth who are aging out of foster care. CWS is currently participating in the National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD) and California Youth Transitions to Adulthood Study (CalYOUTH). Local CWS policies and procedures are implemented as a result of mandates by California Department of Social Services (CDSS) notices and Manual of Policies and Procedures, which are developed from various federal and State statutes and regulations. Changes in federal and State legislation will be influenced by both the NYTD and CalYOUTH studies.

National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD):

The National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD) is a national data collection and analysis system that was created to track characteristics of youth receiving independent living services, including education, employment and housing information. NYTD federal requirements mandate that states collect outcomes data by offering a survey to youth in care who reach their 17th birthday. Youth who participated in the initial survey must be surveyed again at ages 19 and 21. Findings from the NYTD study can be obtained from <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/resource/data-briefs>.

California Youth Transitions to Adulthood Study (CalYOUTH):

The California Youth Transitions to Adulthood Study (CalYOUTH) is an evaluation of the impact of the California Fostering Connections to Success Act on outcomes during the transition to adulthood for foster youth. CalYOUTH includes collection and analysis of information from three sources: transition-age youth (also at ages 17, 19 and 21), child welfare workers, and government program data.

CalYOUTH Wave 2 survey results, which included youth 19 years of age, described the following of San Diego foster care alumni:

- Over 71% of reported have obtained High School or certificate of proficiency.
- Over 67% have reported that Extended Foster Care was helpful towards independence.
- Over 67% have reported that Extended Foster Care was helpful toward education goals.
- 50% reported that Extended Foster Care helped “a lot” in making progress towards employment.
- Over 71% reported that case management supported in meeting their goals while in Extended Foster Care.

Additional information about the CalYOUTH study can be found at:

<http://calswec.berkeley.edu/toolkits/fostering-connections-after-18-ab-12/cal youth-evaluation>.

Because the NYTD and CalYOUTH studies are state- and nation-wide, they provide a more robust analysis of the effectiveness of policies and programs than a San Diego-specific study could. The data collection, evaluation and analysis associated with these studies could shape policy changes and occur with minimal associated costs (staff time distributing the surveys and responding to the state) to CWS.

CWS did explore partnering with local research agencies, including educational institutions for this recommended effort. Upon consultation with the National Council on Crime and Delinquency (NCCD), potential research methodologies were explored. NCCD identified two possible research options, each costing up to \$300,000:

- Analysis and matching based on the quality data and identifiers from NYTD, however, this would not be considered a longitudinal study.
- A panel study with individual survey waves or qualitative work which would be complimentary to NYTD, using the same sampling frame.

Additionally, CWS consulted with San Diego State University School of Social Work, Social Policy Institute regarding the possibilities of conducting longitudinal research. The potential longitudinal study could compare a group of youth who did not participate in Extended Foster Care to a group of youth who did participate. CWS Extended Foster Care Program is specifically designed to provide case management services to youth who remain in foster care past their 18th birthday as Non-Minor Dependents (NMDs). This would be an 8-10 year longitudinal study assessing the individual's current situation at various age stages (cohorts) from 18 to 25 years of age. Data could be collected by:

- Qualitative data collection through interviews with youth, family members, HHSA providers, and community-based service providers.
- Quantitative data collection through access to multiple agencies, such as CalFresh or CalWORKs.

This effort would cost up to approximately \$400,000 per year.

Not only do the NCCD and San Diego State University research options cost a significant amount, neither option could provide the level of analysis on current policies and programs that the NYTD and CalYOUTH studies, which we already participate in, could provide.

With regards to the CWS Extended Foster Care Program, internally, for the past 18 months, CWS Policy and Program Support team members have been reviewing and analyzing the current Program. Applying the Lean Six Sigma methodology, a team effort is utilized to improve performance by systematically removing process duplication and creating consistency in practices and processes.

The NYTD and CalYOUTH efforts have indicated there are significant challenges in contacting and locating individual youth to participate in the longitudinal research. Upon exiting foster care, CWS could ask every youth if they would sign a consent form allowing for periodic follow-up, however, simply obtaining consent would not be sufficient for conducting this type of research due to the following challenges:

- Research would require consent from former foster youth as well as data sharing agreements between CWS, multiple law enforcement agencies and other systems as indicated.
- Even with implemented data sharing agreements, none of the data systems among involved agencies capture data in the same ways.
- Data matching would have to be done by hand, a very laborious process prone to significant errors.
- Children's Legal Services of San Diego (CLS) would also need to support CWS asking youth for consent as they are the attorneys representing these youth in care. CLS may counsel youth against providing consent for ongoing contact from CWS.

- As reported by NYTD and CalYOUTH researchers, even if youth consent to ongoing follow-up, CWS anticipates significant challenges in maintaining current contact information for foster care alumni, as well as securing responses to CWS inquiries.

CWS also reviewed potential funding opportunities for conducting research and determined that this would be cost prohibitive due to the factors involved with longitudinal studies. Additional, potential funds for special CWS projects would likely come in the form of grants. CWS could explore funding sources in collaboration with partner agencies, however, grants would need to be available for specific topics related to examining outcomes for youth exiting foster care. At this time, CWS is not aware of any grants available related to examining outcome for youth exiting foster care.

In sum, given the existing research efforts already in place, as well as the fiscal and operational challenges associated with implementing a local research study, CWS does not recommend implementation of this recommendation at this time.

The 2015-2016 Grand Jury Recommendation 17-54 to the Health and Human Services Agency and the Health and Human Services Agency's complete response is below:

17-54: Utilizes existing County databases to determine how many individuals have been subject to CWS have ultimately been users of the adult welfare system or subject to the criminal justice system.

Response: This recommendation requires further analysis. By December 1, 2017, the County of San Diego HHSA CWS will conduct analyses, as well as explore the legal authority to determine how many individuals previously involved with CWS become consumers of San Diego County's adult welfare system or subject to the San Diego County criminal justice system.

CWS has diligently implemented policies, procedures, and services to ensure age appropriate, developmentally and culturally appropriate services are provided to youth to assist them as they transition from foster care into independence/adulthood. Currently, there is no mechanism to determine the number of former CWS clients who become involved in the adult welfare system or subject to the criminal justice system. There are legal barriers that would make an analysis like this almost prohibitive. In addition, utilizing information about former foster youth for ongoing evaluation would require consent which could be difficult to obtain. Often, youth do not want to be identified as former foster youth and legal counsel may advise against ongoing contact from CWS.

An analyses such as this would also require data sharing agreements between the Health and Human Services Agency (HHSA) and multiple law enforcement agencies. Even if data sharing agreements were implemented, none of the data systems capture data in the same way. Data matching would have to be done by hand, a very laborious process prone to significant errors. Given the levels of confidentiality for both CWS and law enforcement, conducting this type of data matching would be extremely labor intensive and difficult.

HHSA could attempt to match client data across HHSA databases to analyze if former foster youth are now receiving, for example, CalWORKs or CalFresh benefits or mental health services as an adult. However, as mentioned previously, the data systems do not capture data in the same way, making data matching difficult and prone to errors. Additionally, each of these programs has its own confidentiality provisions, and if clients do not consent to allow HHSA to share information across departments, our ability to gather these types of trends will be limited.

The County of San Diego CWS strongly identifies with the importance of implementing effective and efficient CWS policies and programs to ensure a successful transition from foster care into independence/adulthood. At this time, however, the legal, data and systems barriers associated with an analysis such as this would be significant. The ability to collect accurate, timely and consistent data is unlikely and CWS is not confident the information obtained would be actionable given the barriers listed above.

Please let us know if you have any further questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Helen N. Robbins-Meyer". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Helen N. Robbins-Meyer
Chief Administrative Officer