



A broad-based coalition of organizations and individuals committed to protecting California's abused and neglected children.

Children, Families Suffering Under Child Welfare Cut *Abused, neglected children not receiving services, stuck in foster care 'limbo'*

Across the state, abused and neglected children are suffering the effects of former Governor Schwarzenegger's line-item veto of \$80 million General Fund in the Child Welfare Services program in both the 2009-10 and 2010-11 budgets, despite strong, bipartisan support in the Legislature restoring these funds last year. The cut resulted in a loss of \$53 million in federal matching dollars, for a total loss of \$133 million each year the last two years.

This huge funding cut has decimated services to abused and neglected children. More children are remaining in foster care "limbo" with unmet needs, which will cost these children, and California, much more in the long run. After years of improvements in the foster care system, early data shows California is now headed in the wrong direction because of budget cuts, leading to disastrous outcomes for children.

The following information is based on a survey of 58 county child welfare agencies by the County Welfare Directors Association of California (CWDA) on the impacts of the \$133 million veto in the 2009-10 budget year.

Because of Governor Schwarzenegger's vetoes to Child Welfare Services...

Abused and neglected children remain in limbo.

- Abused and neglected children in foster care aren't receiving the urgent care and attention they need, leading to further trauma, because their social workers have been cut. Children are suffering unduly long waits to be safely reunited with their families, and others who can't be reunified are delayed in finding other permanent homes.
 - Sacramento County has lost 30% of its staff since May 2009. Nearly 3,000 children remain in foster care longer than in past years as the remaining staff struggle to meet their needs.
 - Imperial County eliminated its Intensive Family Reunification Services program intended to serve approximately 80 families per year, leaving families without this support unlikely to get their children out of the foster care system.
 - San Joaquin County estimates it will have 60 fewer foster families able to take in children because of cuts in licensing and recruitment.
- Court hearing delays in 22 counties and an increase in continued court hearings in 23 counties means children are waiting longer in foster care for needed services, and for critical life-changing decisions regarding their future.

Nearly 2 million children will be left in potentially life-threatening situations each year.

- Counties cut more than 600 social workers who are on the front lines, making life-and-death decisions every day to protect abused and neglected children. While local programs absorbed the cuts in different ways, the cuts in staff means less services to abused and neglected children and families:
 - The loss of more than 600 social workers if absorbed entirely in Emergency Response services means calls into county CPS hotlines will go unanswered for up to 2 million abused and neglected children annually, and 96,500 reports of abuse and neglect will not be investigated.
 - The loss of more than 600 social workers if absorbed entirely in Family Maintenance programs means 17,815 children will go without services to prevent foster care placement and help children remain safely at home with their own families. This translates into higher costs as children instead are placed into foster care.



- The loss of more than 600 social workers if absorbed entirely in Family Reunification means 13,743 children would be unable to reunify with their families, and 27,486 children would languish in foster care because they cannot find permanency through adoption or legal guardianship.
- Another 235 support workers were cut. These workers ensured relative caregivers were assessed, recruited foster parents, transported children to court hearings, and arranged visitations between children and their parents.

Abused and neglected children do not get the dedicated attention they need.

- California needs 1,817 additional social workers to meet *minimum* recommended standards to serve abused and neglected children, and 4,270 more social workers to ensure positive outcomes for children. In Permanent Placement, for example, this would reduce the number of children served per worker, from 54 children per worker, to 12 to 17 children for whom permanent, loving homes can be sought.

Budget cuts yield fewer prevention services designed to keep families intact and avoid higher costs in foster care.

- Monterey, Riverside, San Bernardino, San Diego, San Francisco, Siskiyou, Tehama, and Yolo counties all reduced and/or eliminated early intervention services to families who come to the attention of child welfare agencies, leaving nearly 6,000 families without the support needed to avoid children being removed from homes.
- Sacramento County severely scaled back services, including home visitations, offered through its *Birth and Beyond* family resource centers, eliminating services for 8,500 families.
- Nevada, Sacramento, San Francisco, San Mateo, and Tuolumne counties have cut services that provide crisis relief to parents in distress. San Mateo County cut services by 33%, San Francisco County eliminated its respite program for at-risk families, afflicting 50 families in that county.

Abused and neglected children aren't receiving care to recover from maltreatment, and support systems needed to help mend families are diminishing.

- San Mateo County cut the number of public health nurses available to meet the basic health needs of abused and neglected children from seven to four nurses, impacting 42% of children in the county system.
- Butte and San Diego counties were forced to reduce counseling services for sexual abuse victims, impacting 35 exploited children in those two counties. San Diego County eliminated a mental health therapy program for troubled teens designed to reduce criminal behavior and prevent youth from being removed from their homes.
- Alcohol and drug services, mental health services, and parenting counseling and support are critical services needed to protect children from abuse and neglect in their homes. Yet, these programs have been devastated:
 - Contra Costa County cut parenting services funding, forcing nearly 70% of its families to seek these services elsewhere.
 - Merced County reduced several services including family counseling, which will impact 35% of families served.
 - Butte County reduced parenting counseling, support and education services impacting 200 families in that county.
 - Riverside County eliminated a substance abuse treatment program, affecting more than 3,000 families, and reduced various parenting and support programs and impacting 7,028 families.



Foster youth who “age out” of the system are in danger of becoming homeless and unemployed because of less assistance to become self sufficient.

An estimated 16,800 current and former foster youth statewide lost out on \$3.6 million in Foster Youth Stipends in 2009, funds used to help these youth transition to self sufficiency. The funds were partially restored in 2010-11, yet many emancipating foster youth will go without modest grants of \$50 to \$500 for critical items such as bus/transit passes, emergency auto repairs and utility payments, security deposits for a first apartment, participating in certificate programs leading to employment and other emergency needs. Orange County lost \$74,500 in 2009 which had been used to leverage an additional \$650,000 from community partners to support 900 emancipated foster youth served in Orange County.

- Many counties have reduced Independent Living Services, which provide skills training for youth as they exit foster care. Imperial County no longer offers these services at multiple sites; Merced County reduced ILP classes impacting 50% of its foster youth.

Early data shows that California is headed in the WRONG direction and not protecting children.

California's Child Welfare Outcomes and Accountability System tracks child outcomes in the areas of safety, permanency and well-being. Early indicators show California is headed in the WRONG direction. Our review of initial outcome data, and CWS/CMS data as compiled by Safe Measures, a tracking tool used in many counties to track work processes, indicates:

- Statewide, reports of abuse and neglect are less likely to be timely investigated, dropping from 93% to 86% between July 2009 and August 2010. Many counties are having difficulty keeping up with demand.
- Fewer children who are being served by Child Welfare Services have an approved case plan in place, and it's taking longer to investigate and initiate services to abused and neglected children, indicated by the increase in abuse and neglect referrals open 31 days or more.
- Foster children are less stable in their placements and experiencing more placement moves. Since the veto, placement changes are trending upward, increasing 5% since the 2009 veto to 38% of foster children who have been moved to other foster placements.
- Children's health is at risk. The percentage of children with timely health exams is steadily decreasing, dropping from 86% to 81% since July 2009.
- Even abused and neglected children in the Title IV-E Waiver demonstration counties were not shielded from the budget ax. The \$17 million in state cuts to Los Angeles County translated into 108 fewer emergency response social workers and support staff to meet local demands and keep children safer. The end result is that thousands of children in Los Angeles County are less safe due to former Governor Schwarzenegger's actions the last two years.

CALL TO ACTION: The Legislature showed strong bipartisan support for restoring the funds in the 2010-11 budget. We are hopeful under the new administration, we can work with the Governor and Legislature to quickly restore Child Welfare Services funding and protect these vulnerable children from further trauma and devastation.

For questions about this fact sheet, contact Frank Mecca, CWDA Executive Director, at fmecca@cwda.org or (916) 443-1749. For information about the Coalition or to get involved, contact Diana Boyer at dboyer@cwda.org or visit www.protectourchildrenca.org (ver. 1/20/2011).