

# **SOLANO COUNTY GRAND JURY**



## **Child Protective Services**



**2004-2005 Grand Jury Report**

**Issued: June 28, 2005**

# **Health and Social Services Child Protective Services 2004-2005 Grand Jury Report**

## **I. Reason for Investigation**

The 2004-2005 Grand Jury elected to continue the monitoring of Child Protective Services (CPS) as recommended by the 2003-2004 Grand Jury. The 2003-2004 Grand Jury Report said, "Although there have been internal and external attempts to correct these deficiencies, CPS has continued to demonstrate an inability to self-correct."

## **II. Procedure**

The Grand Jury:

- Interviewed the Deputy Director, Child Welfare Services
- Interviewed the Ombudsperson for Solano County's Child Welfare Services
- Interviewed Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) representative
- Reviewed the 2003-2004 Grand Jury Report on Child Protective Services (CPS)
- Reviewed the response letters to the 2003-2004 Grand Jury Report by the Director of Health and Social Services Department
- Reviewed 2001-2002 Grand Jury Report, Part Three of Three, CPS

The Grand Jury received and reviewed the following documents:

- CWLA Final Report dated September 25, 2001
- 2001 Health and Social Services response to the CWLA Report
- CPS Memorandum dated November 18, 2004, information about new employee training for the past twelve months
- Scope of Work, contract with CWLA, December, 2004
- Solano County Child Welfare Services *Assessment of Leadership and Other Factors Impacting Organizational Performance* CWLA report dated March 25, 2005
- Child Welfare Services *Preliminary Response of the Child Welfare League of America Assessment* dated April 20, 2005

## **III. Background**

Since at least 1998, there has been ongoing concern with the CPS Division of Health and Social Services (HSS). CWLA was commissioned by the County to do a study and published its findings and recommendations in a report dated September 25, 2001. The Grand Jury report of 2001-2002 found "There is enough evidence to support a need for the Grand Jury to place CPS on the list of agencies to visit each year, checking progress in the areas of organization, training and data-based monitoring system."

The 2003-2004 Grand Jury further recommended that the Board of Supervisors form an external committee independent of HSS consisting of former judges, non-Solano County social workers,

academics, concerned citizens and union officials to review the entire CPS program and recommend changes. The Department of Health and Social Services recommended that the Board of Supervisors not form an independent committee but rather commission CWLA to re-evaluate CPS.

In December 2004, the Board of Supervisors commissioned CWLA to “assess CWS [CPS] organizational leadership and other key factors, such as policy, training, and communication, impacting organizational performance, and recommend strategies to strengthen its capacity to serve children and families.”

Both 2001-2002 and 2003-2004 Grand Juries found that CPS has not maintained an effective level of self-monitoring in the areas of organizational culture, social worker and supervisor training, and sustained ongoing evaluations of its workers. The March 2005 CWLA report said “there are serious systemic and organizational culture problems that must be addressed.” They identified a number of themes which are:

- The need to centralize and formalize CWS [CPS] business functions
- Confusion regarding roles and policies
- Strong commitment to service delivery shown in positive client outcomes
- Oversensitivity to negative feedback
- The need for mutual accountability and teamwork at all levels in the organization

The CWLA identified six goals and 27 related recommendations to improve organizational performance of Solano County CWS [CPS]. The report includes a proposed implementation plan.

The new Deputy Director of Child Welfare Services, who has been in place since September 2004, has been evaluating the division with emphasis on employee training, ongoing employee evaluations and organizational culture. During the course of the CWLA interviews a heightened awareness of organizational culture and the impacts it has on organizational performance seems to be developing among CPS staff at all levels.

An ongoing concern of the 2004-2005 Grand Jury is the lack of external oversight of the Department. The 2001 CWLA report recommended the formation of an external oversight group. In a May 2005 interview with the Grand Jury, a CWLA representative acknowledged that external follow-up was needed and said that it would be added to the report recommendations.

In response to the 2001 CWLA recommendation regarding external oversight, the Department established an ombudsman program. While the Grand Jury recognizes the value of Solano County’s Child Welfare Services Ombudsman Program, it is not designed to provide external oversight of the type recommended by CWLA and the Grand Jury.

#### **IV. Findings and Recommendations**

**Finding # 1** – Both the 2003-2004 Grand Jury and the 2001 CWLA Report recommend the formation of an independent external reviewing group. In its 2001 response to the CWLA report, the Department stated it had addressed this recommendation by setting up an Ombudsman Program. In 2004, the Department addressed the Grand Jury’s recommendation by commissioning another CWLA report.

The Grand Jury notes that its recommendation for an independent commission was published on August 2004. Ten months later, after a lengthy bureaucratic process, the Grand Jury has yet to receive the first solid evidence of any measurable progress.

**Recommendation # 1** – The Grand Jury again recommends that the Board of Supervisors direct the formation of an external committee independent of HSS drawn from former judges, non-Solano County social workers, academics, concerned citizens and union officials, to provide ongoing review of the entire CPS program and recommend changes.

**Finding # 2** –The findings and recommendations of the March 2005 CWLA report are quite clear and provide an implementation plan, which is broken down into 90 days, 6 months, 9 months and one year timeframes. It further provides assessment tools for the Department.

**Recommendation # 2** – The Board of Supervisors should ensure that CWLA recommendations are immediately implemented following the recommended timetable.

**Finding # 3** - Solano County’s Child Welfare Services Ombudsman Program is a valuable service to assist individuals in navigating the CWS [CPS} system. It is not designed to provide external oversight for the department as a whole.

**Recommendation # 3** – The Board of Supervisors should continue to fund this valuable program and the Department should increase its efforts to publicize the existence of the program.

## V. Comments

Organizational issues including departmental culture and lack of on-the-job training were found to have a negative affect on the ability of social workers to provide proper support for our children and families in crisis.

## VI. Affected Agencies

- Solano County Board of Supervisors
- Solano County Health and Social Services

### Courtesy Copies:

- Solano County’s Child Welfare Services Ombudsperson
- Child Welfare League of America