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Economy & Efficiency Commission Presentation

Editorial Note: Although every effort has been made to insure the accuracy of the material in this presentation, the scope of the material covered and the discussions undertaken lends itself to the possibility of minor transcription misinterpretations.

PRESENTATION BY
Ms. Anita Bock, Director, Los Angeles County Children & Family Services
Topic: Child Care in Los Angeles County
April 6, 2000

Chairman Philibosian introduced Ms. Bock remarking on her accomplishments since taking office.

Ms. Bock began her presentation by giving a brief background of her qualifications and accomplishments in the field of Children and Family Services. She continued saying that the reason she accepted the position as Director of Los Angeles County Children and Family Services Department was because she is a passionate child and family advocate.

Ms. Bock felt that this opportunity presents an extraordinary opportunity to make massive changes to help a large number of children and families in the system. She added that her business background, combined with her law background, makes it possible to bring about the changes that are needed.

The department is very troubled, she commented, adding that she found the innumerable audit reports to be clear, concise and articulated the key problems that are currently facing Los Angeles County. She said that the problems are no different than those facing child welfare across the country.

After taking office in January she had decided that there was a need for substantial reorganization and changes in senior management. Presently the administrative infrastructure of the agency requires attention. Ms. Bock stated that the accepted industry standard for administrative overhead ranges between twelve and twenty percent. An analysis of The Children and Family Services Department will show that it is operating with an administrative overhead of somewhere in the three percent range.

Ms. Bock noted that the agency, in addition to being a service provider, it is also a business. As a result, she said that it was her intent to run the agency as a business. She knew what her bottom line was, the quality of service that is provided to the public.

Ms. Bock stated that although issues of accountability are frequently overlooked, it is her hope that accountability can be re-instilled into this agency. She said that not only has the agency been unaccountable, but people working under contract for the agency have not been held as accountable as they should. A system has to be designed in the years to come that maintains a good and positive working relationship with the Departments business partners. The concept of accountability can be introduced into the process without the necessity of creating undue political pressure. Such an effort is time consuming and difficult for all parties involved.

Ms. Bock felt that the quality of care, generally speaking, across the county is not good. The system itself is further complicated by liability issues. The agency engages in activities every day which involves taking care of children and families. This subjects the agency to enormous liability exposure. The community has to come to some understanding of an acceptable level of risk for children in county care. She said that tragically the children within the system are not leading a meaningful quality life because no one is willing to take any level of risk. This is an issue that must be dealt with across the Federal, State and local governments. There has to be an environment created in which children are allowed to be children. She added that she felt that it was incumbent on adults to keep children from suffering.

Ms. Bock said that the agency has already gone through a substantial reorganization. Seven major bureaus in the department were collapsed into four. The top layer of management has completely been changed, which has changed the tone of the agency. She said that she was pleased to report that, through the use of the internet and e-mail, she is able to be in daily contact with front line staff. She stated that there were to be additional organizational changes to be made in the months to come.

Ms. Bock in summarizing stated that she had advised the Board that changes of this magnitude take two to three years to achieve a permanent systemic change. It will probably take five years to completely achieve the level of quality that is desired throughout the system. She added that it was her hope to convince the community stakeholders to adopt a strength-based approach to the agency.

In closing her presentation Ms. Bock thanked the Commission for the opportunity to address the Commission. She said that the agency would always be open to recommendations and suggestions.

Commissioner Thompson shared an experience he had with the agency and how pleased he was with the swirl, competent and positive results achieved by the agency.

Commissioner Kennedy asked about Ms. Bock's relationship with the unions. Ms. Bock answered that she viewed the unions as an organizational opportunity, rather than an obstacle. She said that her exposure to unions has been limited, but she viewed the unions as she would view any other community partner. She has met with the unions upon assuming her position to explain her views and determine how to bring about change. She stated that, in her opinion, she and the unions would have a good working relationship. Many issues relate to establishing trust and that is going to take some time to overcome. The unions will discover that when she says something it can be relied on.

Vice Chairman Luncent asked Ms. Bock that since she had frequently used the term "accountability" would she give an example of what she meant by the term. Ms. Bock commented that she had produced a detailed monthly report that she used in Florida. Government tends to use narrative reports that make it very difficult to determine whether the performance is good, bad or indifferent. This report style is designed to be used as a management tool for accountability purposes. The Department has begun the preparation of a monthly report that will be short and concise to track key indicators within the agency. These indicators will be negotiated with each bureau chief. This approach will then tie back to the administrative infrastructure. She added that the agency's technology is far behind what it ought to be and that she intended to correct this problem.

Chairman Philibosian thanked Ms. Bock for her presentation noting the importance of her approach to management to the County and the desire of the Commission to assist her in the accomplishment of her goals

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