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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
Dr. Sharon G. Watson, Consultant
Topic: Emancipation Report Impacts**

May 2, 2002

Chairman Philibosian welcomed Dr. Sharon G. Watson to the Commission meeting, noting that many of the Commissioners were already acquainted with her from her work on the Commission's recently published "A Review of Emancipation Services". He continued noting that Dr. Watson has many years of experience and has made numerous contributions to children's services throughout the county.

Dr. Watson began by reviewing how she had come to be involved in the Commission's report. Originally, the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO), in response to a request by the Board of Supervisors, asked her to prepare an overview and make recommendations on the problems within the emancipated foster youth system. In the course of this effort she was asked to assist the Commission in the preparation of its report, focusing on transitional housing.

Dr. Watson stated that, based upon her ongoing work, transitional housing has proved to be the most critical need for these youth. Since this is a very complex system, with multiple programs, it is difficult for people to understand the programs, where the housing resources were, where the youth lived, and the needs of youth for different types of housing. Her contribution to the Commission's report was to analyze these issues. The results charted six major housing programs that illustrated that some portions of the county had several programs and others not at all. This information was contrasted with the needs of this population with the objective of being able to identify where future housing should be developed.

She felt that the report did a good job in laying out the complexities involved in transitional housing. It revealed that transitional housing involves a continuum of housing from emergency/crisis shelters, through transitional housing, to the greatest need for permanent affordable housing, not only for this population, but those needing permanent affordable housing throughout the county.

Following her work on the Commission's report, she was asked to head up an Interim Team, which reports to the CAO. This team works primarily with the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) and the Probation Department, together with participants from seven program related county departments and key community representatives, to overhaul the system and implement the recommendations made to the CAO. The Interim Team is comprised of 8 people who provide staff assistance to make the system work as it is envisioned. The Design Team, which was created to provide meaningful input in the development of an

effective program, includes representatives from the appropriate County departments, the community, and major partners, as well as the members of the Interim Team. The Design Team meets bi-weekly to enable members to provide input and support on the direction of the changes that will shape the system. In fact, all of the decisions as to what is to be done are to be made by the Design Team, not the Interim Team.

The Interim Team functions as assistants or enablers, to break down political barriers and to do the necessary research. The Interim Team also created an Advisory Team, about 40-50 people that are actually implementing programs, including major contractors, to work with the Design Team to further broaden the support and reach out to community providers and line personnel. The focus of this effort is to come up with a reformed system and plans as to the future direction and structure. Certainly, housing is a major piece of the efforts of these teams.

In addition, other areas of interest that were addressed in the Commission's report were incorporated into the Interim Team work plan, for example the department head performance objectives.

Dr. Watson discussed other key areas of the program work plan, including:

1. Building a network of alumni centers for youth 18-21, since they are the ones who have the least access to currently available programs. While they have been emancipated, they were often not given the support or preparation needed to be successful. Currently, there are two stand-alone centers run by the DCFS and Casey Family Programs located in Culver City and Pasadena respectively. After reviewing the programs provided at these centers, the Interim Team realized that although these centers have a number of good programs, additional programs could accomplish more for the youth they serve.

What has been done as a result is to put together a list of components/core services that should be available at an Alumni Center. Focus groups with the youth served identified a component list for things like a like a mail drop and voice mail; things they wanted in addition to the services currently being provided, jobs, health insurance, etc. The attempt now is to build a network of 16 alumni centers, two in each of the county's service planning areas (SPAS). The goal is to try to get 5-6 sites up and running by fall, with a plan on how to get the remainder up within the next year. An effort is being made to hook these sites on to facilities that already exist for youth, i.e. efforts are being made to hook up with two County 'WorkSource' Centers, one in El Monte and one in the Antelope Valley, with more anticipated in the future.

2. Another item being worked on is mentoring, in other words someone that can help the youth in navigating the system. Youth, especially those with special needs, will be assigned at age 14 to mentors who can guide them through the system, hopefully until age 21. Some of these mentors will be emancipated foster youth. The other way is to look at creating or using existing mentoring programs, such as the one previously created by the BAR Association or Big Brothers and/or Big Sisters. This mentoring approach will also help those that are responsible for case management in the effective delivery of services.
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4. There have been a number of problems with 'E-step', which is the assessment and planning program for 14-15 year olds. In addressing these problems, the role and responsibilities of Community Service Workers (CSW), Deputy Probation Officers (DPO), community workers and Independent Living Program Coordinators have now been outlined and sorted out with representatives of each of these

constituencies to insure their agreement. Old forms have been eliminated and the original assessments for 14-15 year olds will now feed into the Transitional Independent Living Plan (TILP).

5. Another big challenge is the lack of a system to track youth. Progress has been made by defining an initial set of outcomes for the youth to achieve to be self-sufficient and indicators for how to track those outcomes. A review of other smaller tracking systems showed that many of the proposed indicators are, in fact, there. Now it is a process of being able to pull them up. The question does not appear to be that the State CMS/CWS System doesn't work, but rather that there are a number of other populations of youth eligible for ILP that are not captured under that system – this is the real problem. The tracking system is being built that all of the existing systems can upload to. In looking at a couple of systems, the objective is to create an overarching system where data is already being collected by other systems and can then be moved into a master system without creating additional workload. This system will be outcome-based and will be able to track which youth receives which services and one that develops data to assist in management and long term evaluation to determine what is working and what is not working.
6. Communication covering service eligibility and availability has proven to be a critical need. To address this need, a printed resource guide has been developed and distributed throughout the county to youth, group homes, foster care individuals, relative provider associations, the court for distribution and at meetings and job fairs. As another means of communication, approval has been given for a web site designed specifically for these youth to allow them to update their information, find out information about services and programs and review their program eligibility.
7. The budget has also been a major point of concern. Three pieces of the budget have been discussed:
 1. A review to determine how much has been spent in 2001/2002 and how much will be left to insure that it is spent responsibly. As a result a ban has been placed on issuing any gift certificates and other items until proper tracking mechanisms that comply with the requirements of the Auditor-Controller for their distribution are put in place.
 2. There have been numerous challenges in getting accurate information to review the budget. One of the biggest challenges in this process was the lack of understanding of such things as accounting for expenditures, i.e. cash vs. accrual, coding of expenditures. These items have been addressed.
 3. Finally, efforts have been made to finalize the spending plan for the 2002-2003 budget. More importantly, a five-year budget is being undertaken. Without a five-year outlook projects requiring long term commitments, like housing, won't be addressed without knowing service dollars are attached. It is also important to understand that the five year budget will also include all the monies spent on the ILP programs, not just the federal and state monies that are currently indicated in the yearly budget.

Dr. Watson commented that these were some of the main areas of focus being undertaken, but that there were many other areas being evaluated as well.

Chairman Philibosian asked about the root of the problem, meaning who had allowed the system to get to this point. Dr. Watson replied that unfortunately the County had allowed these things to happen, but that the purpose of having a Design Team was to fix the problem. Chairman Philibosian asked for clarification on the members of the Design Team. Dr. Watson responded that the Interim Team includes her as team leader, a data contracts evaluation expert, a communications expert, a housing expert, a budget person, a professor from USC on the outcome and indicators element of the project, a knowledgeable program person from DCFS and a team coordinator to support the entire team. The Design Team includes all of the Interim Team, an emancipated youth, a representative from the Children's Commission, a representative from the Services Integration Bureau of the CAO's office, the DCFS Emancipation Service Program head, the Probation Department Emancipation Services Program head, a representative from the Casey Family programs, two

ILP coordinators – one from DCFS and one from Probation, a representative from the Community Development Commission, a representative from Mental Health, a representative from Community and Senior Services, and a representative from the United Friends of the Children. In addition, there are another 40-50 people who are on the Advisory Team.

Chairman Philibosian asked why it took a group of outside consultants to organize the County so that it could spend the budget appropriately and who had requested their services. Dr. Watson replied that the Board of Supervisors had made the request after the short-term study she had prepared was presented to the Board. Chairman Philibosian then asked if Dr. Watson knew why the system was dysfunctional. Dr. Watson replied that part of the problem was administrative; there were 7 different program directors of DCFS and 5 program directors for Probation during the time the ILP program was being formed which resulted in mixed messages to staff. Part was inexperience, at the time, in working with outside partners and even other county departments. Other problems were philosophical, with differing viewpoints about who should receive services and what types of services should be offered. All in all, there was no clear vision, there wasn't clear leadership, and there weren't shared goals among the participants.

Chairman Philibosian then asked that since the Interim Team is temporary what is going to happen after they have left. Dr. Watson felt that since the team has been teaching the people involved how to develop a multi-agency, integrated program, how to manage it, and having all of the elements in place, that there was every chance that they would be able to continue the work. Additionally, the Final Report to the CAO will present findings outlining the overall progress made, what has been done specifically to improve service delivery and will present what is the recommended future course for this program, including governance. Chairman Philibosian then asked what she saw as this Commission's role in the coming months. Dr. Watson replied that she felt there had been already been a partnering, especially the influence the Economy and Efficiency Commission had in publishing its Emancipation Services Report. She felt that the Commission should be involved at the final stages when findings are to be made to the Board to assist in developing presentation strategies. Chairman Philibosian felt that when the Interim Team leaves that someone has to be in charge of this program.

Commissioner Petak commented that the problems uncovered in Dr. Watson's review are probably systemic within the departments noting that institutionalizing change is very difficult. He felt that without the 100% support of the Board of Supervisors that the probability of long-term success diminishes. Dr. Watson responded that since each Board Office was interested in an effective resolution to this problem, that she was optimistic that if the team produced something that worked, the Supervisors would stand behind this issue. As a side note, if this process proves to be successful, the lessons learned could become the model for improving these types of programs in the future.

Commissioner Simmons asked Dr. Watson about the six-bed rule for housing foster kids. Dr. Watson explained that this rule allows someone to set up a foster or group home of six or fewer youth without consideration for zoning or residential approval. Without this rule, attempts to establish new housing for these youth would be paralyzed. Commissioner Simmons clarified that his question was prompted by his understanding that this type of housing was not required to be inspected. Dr. Watson replied that, as an aside, she felt that even six kids in one foster household was probably too much and that one or two would be much better, although 6 bed group homes have more supervision and structure. She did feel that these small group homes are subject to State inspections and guidelines. Commissioner Simmons then asked about the type of training provided to the youth. Dr. Watson replied that the youth receive training in housing, life skills, job skills and education. In fact, the ILP budget has been reorganized so that each item in the budget will fall under one of these four areas. This allows administrators of these programs to see how much is being spent and where. It allows the budget to reflect priorities.

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Commissioner Padilla asked about the methods used to ensure that the people involved in this process did not lose sight of the need to make sure these kids knew they were cared for and loved. He felt that this was the crux of the issue because any program would not solve the problem if the youth didn't feel that someone cared for them. What happens to the youth who are eligible for benefits but perhaps don't want the services? Perhaps the focus should be on the kid who does want the services. Secondly, how is the county going to work with the performance agreement objectives in keeping the program on track? Dr. Watson agreed with his statement about need to show caring and love for these youth and felt that most of the people involved in the program really did care. On top of that, the mentoring program will add yet another person to make the youth feel cared for. As for eligibility, everyone who is eligible should be identified and offered the services to which they are entitled. The Alumni Centers are going to be one of the places used to distribute information about what is available to the individual. As far as the performance measures, an interim agreement has to be established for determining department head commitments. This agreement will rollover into the department head performance objectives. This will be a future process since, until the program is established, it is unclear what the objectives will be.

Commissioner Hill stated that she has seen many youth go through the programs and yet they are doomed ultimately to fail because they don't have basic skills, like reading. Dr. Watson replied that it was indeed an issue and a concern of those involved in this process. In fact, DCFS's Education Initiative is now a part of the Emancipation Program. One of the problems with literacy though is that it needs to be tackled early in the process. A coordinated planned approach to improve literacy rates is needed in the field of education to develop an effective strategy.

Commissioner Simmons asked about the amount of money per child paid to the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) for training the kids. Dr. Watson commented that there is a program called the "Foster Youth Initiative" which is in several schools. This program is designed to provide support to the foster youth who needed extra care and attention. She felt that these were the kinds of programs that needed to be expanded, but was unsure of the actual spending figures for these types of programs in the LAUSD.

Chairman Philibosian thanked Dr. Watson for her presentation, noting that this Commission appreciated her efforts and encouraged her future endeavors.

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