

# FOR YOUR INFORMATION

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Issue 16-22

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## DEDICATED DEPENDENCY COURT ROOM FOR COMMERCIALLY SEXUALLY EXPLOITED CHILDREN (CSEC)

### DEDICATION TO RESTORATION THROUGH EMPOWERMENT, ADVOCACY AND MENTORING (DREAM) COURT

In partnership with the Los Angeles Superior Court, County Counsel, and Children's Law Center (CLC), the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) initiated a dedicated court room in Department 417 to serve Commercially Sexually Exploited Children (CSEC) in the dependency system. The establishment of the dedicated court room, named the Dedication to Restoration through Empowerment, Advocacy, and Mentoring (DREAM) Court, was based on lessons learned from the Succeeding Through Achievement and Resilience (STAR) Court in the delinquency system. By having a dedicated Judge/Hearing Officer, and CSEC trained and informed County Counsel, CLC attorney, and DCFS staff, DREAM Court will allow for increased expertise, consistency in practice, and better outcomes for the CSEC population. Initiated in January 2016, DREAM Court already has over 45 CSEC cases assigned to its calendar.

#### Case Criteria

All new CSEC filed petitions with a WIC 300(b)(2) count will be assigned to DREAM Court. In 2014, SB 855 amended Welfare and Institutions Code (WIC) and clarified that sexually exploited children whose parents or guardians were unable or unwilling to protect them may fall within the WIC 300 (b)(2) and may be adjudged as dependents of the juvenile courts.

Additionally, existing cases involving commercially exploited youth that are not currently assigned to the DREAM court may be transferred to the DREAM court at any Status Review Hearing. Any involved party may request the transfer, e.g. Hearing Officer, child's attorney, DCFS, or parent's attorney. Additionally, any involved party may request the court not transfer the case and that a hearing be set to determine whether the case will transfer or remain in the court of the original assignment. The assigned Hearing Officer makes the final recommendation as to whether or not the case should be transferred to the DREAM Court in Department 417.

Children's Social Workers (CSWs) should assess what is in the best interest of the child and consult with County Counsel to determine whether or not a case should be transferred to DREAM Court. When assessing transfer, consideration should be given to the following: 1.) Would the child and family agree to the transfer? 2.) Does the child have a relationship with their current CLC attorney such that it would be detrimental to the child if the case is transferred? (while the CSW will remain the same, the child may have a new a CLC attorney assigned); 3.) Is the child safe and stable and therefore not in need of the CSEC expertise of DREAM Court; 4.) Are there siblings on the case who have a relationship with their existing attorney? (The family's entire case will be transferred to DREAM Court and not just the CSEC portion of the case; 5.) Is the child AWOL? 6.) Other psychosocial factors that would impact youth's progress.

## **Multidisciplinary Team Meeting (MDT)**

Upon assignment of the case to DREAM Court, a MDT will take place the Wednesday the week before the scheduled court hearing. CSEC cases in the DREAM Court will be scheduled on Thursdays following the MDT. MDTs will include all or some of the following: the CLC attorney, DCFS, Department of Mental Health (DMH), Department of Health Services, Probation Department, an assigned child advocate, and Alliance for Children's Rights education advocate (when there is an education issue).

DCFS CSEC trained staff from the Runaway Outreach Unit (ROU) will facilitate the MDTs and will invite the case carrying CSW and SCSW to participate in the MDT. A MDT Action Plan will be developed at the MDT meeting, which will be written up by the CSEC ROU representative and shared with the DREAM Court Judge and other team members prior to the hearing. The Action Plan will outline the case plan and objectives as well as next steps and responsible parties; the MDT write-up is NOT to be attached to the court report.

MDTs are usually held at the Los Angeles County Sheriff Human Trafficking Bureau, which is the building up the hill from the Edelman Children's Court. The CSW, CLC attorney, clinician, or person most familiar with the child will present the case during the MDT, and all participants should be ready to provide information, including but not limited to: 1.) Probation Officer contact information (if applicable); 2.) Delinquency status (e.g. next delinquency court hearing date); 3.) Strengths; 4.) Challenges; 5.) Needs; 6.) Triggers; 7.) Placement Goals, to include stability and needs; 8.) Treatment and Outcome Goals; 7.) School history; and 8) Other relevant issues and important information. If the CSW will be unable to attend the MDT this information should be provided to the ROU staff person in advance of the MDT.



If you have any questions regarding this release please e-mail your question to:

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