



**County of Los Angeles
DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES**

425 Shatto Place, Los Angeles, California 90020
(213) 351-5602

PATRICIA S. PLOEHN, LCSW
Director

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Contact: Louise Grasmehr or Stu Riskin
DCFS Office of Public Affairs
(213) 351-5886

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PRESS RELEASE

Department of Children and Family Services Braces for State Budget Cuts
Services to Children and Families Could Be Jeopardized

The Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS), one of the largest child welfare agencies in the country, is joining in support of the more than 50 other child welfare and human services agencies in the state as they brace for one of the toughest budget years in recent memory. An 11.4 percent cut in Child Welfare Administration funding to DCFS and a 5 to 10 percent decrease in payments to placement providers are proposed in the 2008-2009 budget. In a worst case scenario, these cuts could lead to fewer temporary care facilities for children, less preventative and treatment services to help keep children and families safely together and fewer social workers to uphold stringent legal visitation requirements and response times.

Statewide the picture for child service agencies is grim, with millions of dollars in programs and preventative services at stake in addition to social worker positions. DCFS Director Patricia Ploehn has joined other child welfare leaders and agency directors throughout the state to rally together in support of protecting vital programs.

"We consider this an issue of life and death and we are extremely concerned," said Ploehn. "Over the past seven years, social services in California have taken consistent cuts in order to help reduce deficits, but this year looks to be the most severe yet. The safety and stability of families is at stake and we plan to do everything possible to help prevent or mitigate these cuts."

If the proposed budget cuts are enacted, Ploehn said DCFS could be looking at a shortfall in excess of \$25 million that could affect the following areas:

- Prevention services designed to protect at-risk children from abuse and neglect;
- Reunification services focused on addressing family problems so children can safely return and remain with their families; and
- Permanency services intended to ensure children who cannot safely return home can grow up with a new family through adoption or legal guardianship.

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"To Enrich Lives Through Effective and Caring Service"

In the following weeks, Ploehn will work with the County Welfare Directors Association of California (CWDA), child welfare directors and others throughout the state to urge the legislature to spare these programs from funding cuts.

“County human services directors all over the state are extremely alarmed over the dangerous cuts proposed for child welfare services,” said CWDA Director Frank Mecca. “We have the highest obligation to assure the safety and well-being of abused and neglected children in California, but the agencies in this state need the tools and support to do their jobs effectively. We will all work together to make sure that the most vulnerable in our state do not suffer further.”

Added Ploehn, “Over the past several years, DCFS has made significant strides in keeping children safer, reducing the number of children in foster care and ensuring children grow up in permanent, loving families. Children in the child welfare system are there because they have been victimized by people they should have been able to trust. They should not be victimized again by budget cuts.”

Among its many improvements over the past few years, DCFS recorded its lowest number of children in out-of-home placement in its history at the end of 2007 with less than 20,000 children in out-of-home care, down from an all-time high of more than 50,000 10 years ago.

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Established in 1984, the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services is the public agency charged with ensuring that children grow up safe, physically and emotionally healthy, educated and in permanent homes. DCFS works to ensure that all children have a connection to family, friends, schools and neighborhoods and provides services to children and their families when they are at-risk due to actual and potential child abuse, abandonment, neglect or exploitation. With an annual budget of over \$1.5 billion and a diverse staff of more than 7,000 employees, DCFS serves children and families through 17 offices located throughout Los Angeles County including Los Angeles, Lancaster, San Gabriel Valley, San Fernando Valley and the South Bay area.