



Following a six-month nationwide search process, Brandon T. Nichols was selected to serve as the new director of DCFS.

On July 1, Brandon T. Nichols was appointed director of one of the largest local child welfare jurisdictions in the nation. We caught up recently with Mr. Nichols to learn more about his career journey, why he accepted this role and his vision for the future of the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS).

You are not new to DCFS. How did your career with DCFS start, and why is helping children and families important to you?

When I started my career 25 years ago, this was not the work I imagined I would spend my life doing. Honestly, I started in child welfare because I needed a job, and the County Counsel was hiring attorneys to represent DCFS in juvenile court proceedings, so I took it. All of these years later though, it is hard to imagine something else I would rather do. If my work years are spent helping children and families, I can be proud of how I spent my time.

You have shared that you were not sure if you were the right person to lead DCFS. What was the deciding factor that shifted your perspective?

I do not know that I have *decided* yet, and I may never know for sure. I constantly feel the need to be a better leader and director; in the evenings, I probably will end up thinking about the challenges more than the successes. That said, I agreed to take the job because I care about the families, the work, and the people doing the work, and that is the kind of person I would want to lead DCFS. And, it is hard for me to say *no* when I am asked to take on a difficult task or when I am asked if I can help someone — I can't turn my back on those things. Last, it was a chance for me to go back to a place that I love and work with people who I admire and maybe make it all a little better.

What is one thing that makes you proud to work at DCFS?

I have worked in many spots across the County now, but no place is as loving and caring as DCFS. We have the best people, and I am so honored to be part of that team — I hope I am a little like them.

What is your overarching vision for the department, and how is it different from that of past administrations?

I don't spend a lot of time thinking about the past and how I want to *change* things from what preceded me. Instead, I think about the future and where I want to take us. That future vision is one where communities are resourced and responsive to the needs of families in a way that addresses their trauma, their needs, and their health proactively, so kids are safe and thrive without the involvement of DCFS. We do good work, although I wish the reasons for doing that work — the challenges and issues that families face — did not exist.



New DCFS Director Brandon T. Nichols is sworn in by Chair Holly J. Mitchell, Los Angeles County Supervisor to the Second District.

Think 12 months into the future when you are celebrating your first year of service as director. What has changed? What remains the same?

Challenge is presented by changes in leadership and disruption of direction. We are in the middle of that disruption now, and it is hard to move the department forward in a strategic way. I look forward to that disruption calming down, for us to have a shared understanding of what our priorities and strategies are, and for us to be well underway in doing the work necessary to better serve children and families.

What is something people do not know about you and might be surprised to learn?

I love to cook for large groups. Not large like 10 or 15 people, but large like 250 people. For many years, I cooked food for school fundraisers and would serve hundreds of people a day for several days back-to-back. My children have graduated, and I miss those times, but I have been thinking about how I might be able to cook for some of our offices and programs — both for my own personal enjoyment and to give me an opportunity to meet with people and make their day a little better.

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