



A broad-based coalition of organizations and individuals committed to protecting California's abused and neglected children.

Children, Families Suffering Under Child Welfare Cut *Abused, neglected children not receiving services, stuck in foster care 'limbo'*

Across the state, abused and neglected children are suffering the effects of the Governor's veto of \$133 million (\$80 million General Fund) in the Child Welfare Services program. This huge funding cut has decimated services to abused and neglected children. More children are remaining in foster care "limbo" with unmet needs, which will cost these children, and California, much more in the long run. And this cut is proposed to be continued in the Governor's 2010-11 budget.

After years of improvements in the foster care system, early data shows California is now headed in the wrong direction because of budget cuts, leading to disastrous outcomes for children in the areas of safety, permanency and well-being.

The following information is based on a survey of 58 county child welfare agencies by the County Welfare Directors Association of California (CWDA) on the impacts of the \$133 million veto in the 2009-10 budget year.

Because of the Governor's \$133 million veto to Child Welfare Services...

Abused and neglected children remain in limbo.

- Abused and neglected children in foster care aren't receiving the urgent care and attention they need, leading to further trauma, because their social workers have been cut. Children are suffering unduly long waits to be safely reunited with their families, and others who can't be reunified are delayed in finding other permanent homes.
 - Sacramento County has lost 30% of its staff since May 2009 and has another round of staffing cuts pending. Nearly 3,000 children remain in foster care longer than in past years as the remaining staff struggle to meet their needs.
 - Imperial County eliminated its Intensive Family Reunification Services program intended to serve approximately 80 families per year, leaving families without this support unlikely to get their children out of the foster care system.
 - San Joaquin County estimates it will have 60 fewer foster families able to take in children because of cuts in licensing and recruitment.
- Court hearing delays in 22 counties and an increase in continued court hearings in 23 counties means children are waiting longer in foster care for needed services, and for critical life-changing decisions regarding reunification with their families or permanent placement elsewhere.

Nearly 2 million children will be left in potentially life-threatening situations each year.

- Counties cut more than 600 social workers who are on the front lines, making life-and-death decisions every day to protect abused and neglected children. While local programs absorbed the cuts in different ways, the cuts in staff means less services to abused and neglected children and families:
 - The loss of more than 600 social workers if absorbed entirely in Emergency Response services means calls into county CPS hotlines will go unanswered for up to 2 million abused and neglected children annually, and 96,500 reports of abuse and neglect will not be investigated.
 - The loss of more than 600 social workers if absorbed entirely in Family Maintenance programs means 17,815 children will go without services to prevent foster care placement and help children remain safely at home with their own families. This translates into higher costs as children instead are placed into foster care.



- The loss of more than 600 social workers if absorbed entirely in Family Reunification means 13,743 children would be unable to reunify with their families, and 27,486 children would languish in foster care because they cannot find permanency through adoption or legal guardianship.
- Another 235 support workers were cut. These workers ensured relative caregivers were assessed, recruited foster parents, transported children to court hearings, and arranged visitations between children and their parents.

Abused and neglected children do not get the dedicated attention they need.

- California needs 1,817 additional social workers to meet *minimum* recommended standards to serve abused and neglected children, and 4,270 more social workers to ensure positive outcomes for children. In Permanent Placement, for example, this would reduce the number of children served per worker, from 54 children per worker, to 12 to 17 children for whom permanent, loving homes can be sought.

Budget cuts yield fewer prevention services designed to keep families intact and avoid higher costs in foster care.

- Monterey, Riverside, San Bernardino, San Diego, San Francisco, Siskiyou, Tehama, and Yolo counties all reduced and/or eliminated early intervention services to families who come to the attention of child welfare agencies, leaving nearly 6,000 families without the support needed to avoid children being removed from homes.
- Sacramento County severely scaled back services, including home visitations, offered through its *Birth and Beyond* family resource centers, eliminating services for 8,500 families.
- Nevada, Sacramento, San Francisco, San Mateo, and Tuolumne counties have cut services that provide crisis relief to parents in distress. San Mateo County cut services by 33%, San Francisco County eliminated its respite program for at-risk families, afflicting 50 families in that county.

Abused and neglected children aren't receiving care to recover from maltreatment, and support systems needed to help mend families are diminishing.

- San Mateo County cut the number of public health nurses available to meet the basic health needs of abused and neglected children from seven to four nurses, impacting 42% of children in the county system.
- Butte and San Diego counties were forced to reduce counseling services for sexual abuse victims, impacting 35 exploited children in those two counties. San Diego County eliminated a mental health therapy program for troubled teens designed to reduce criminal behavior and prevent youth from being removed from their homes.
- Alcohol and drug services, mental health services, and parenting counseling and support are critical services needed to protect children from abuse and neglect in their homes. Yet, these programs have been devastated:
 - Contra Costa County cut parenting services funding, forcing nearly 70% of its families to seek these services elsewhere.
 - Merced County reduced several services including family counseling, which will impact 35% of families served.
 - Butte County reduced parenting counseling, support and education services impacting 200 families in that county.
 - Riverside County eliminated a substance abuse treatment program, affecting more than 3,000 families, and reduced various parenting and support programs and impacting 7,028 families.



Foster youth who “age out” of the system are in danger of becoming homeless and unemployed because of less assistance to become self sufficient.

An estimated 16,800 current and former foster youth statewide lost out on \$3.6 million in Foster Youth Stipends used to help these youth transition to self sufficiency. This means youth will go without modest grants of \$50 to \$500 for critical items such as bus/transit passes, emergency auto repairs and utility payments, security deposits for a first apartment, participating in certificate programs leading to employment and other emergency needs. For Orange County the loss of \$74,500 had been used leverage an additional \$650,000 from community partners that will now no longer be available to the 900 emancipated foster youth served in Orange County.

- Many counties have reduced Independent Living Services, which provides skills training for youth as they exit foster care. Imperial County no longer offers these services at multiple sites, Merced County reduced ILP classes impacting 50% of its foster youth.

Early data shows out that California is headed in the WRONG direction and not protecting children.

California’s Child Welfare Outcomes and Accountability System tracks child outcomes in the areas of safety, permanency and well-being. While it is too early to know the precise impact of the veto, early indicators show California is headed in the WRONG direction. Our review of CWS/CMS data as compiled by Safe Measures, a tracking tool used in many counties to track work processes, indicates:

- Statewide, reports of abuse and neglect are less likely to be timely investigated, dropping from 92.9% to 89.2% between July 2009 and February 2010. CPS hotline calls requiring a 10-day response are not timely being met, dropping from 95.9% to 93.1% between September and December 2009 alone, and many counties such as Contra Costa and San Bernardino are having difficulty keeping up with demand.
- Fewer children being served by Child Welfare Services have an approved case plan in place, and foster children who should be seen at least once a month by their social worker are being visited less frequently. Parents of abused and neglected children are also being seen less frequently by social workers, dropping from 81% statewide in August 2009 to 78% as of February 2010.
- Foster children are being moved more frequently and are less stable in their placements. Since the veto, placement changes are trending upward, increasing 5% since last summer.
- Children’s health is at risk. The percentage of children with timely health exams is steadily decreasing, dropping from 86% to 80% since July 2009.
- Even abused and neglected children in the Title IV-E Waiver demonstration counties were not shielded from the budget ax. The \$17 million in state cuts to Los Angeles County translated into 108 fewer emergency response social workers and support staff to meet local demands and keep children safer. The end result is that thousands of children in Los Angeles County are less safe due to the Governor's actions last summer.

CALL TO ACTION: We urge the Legislature and Governor to spare abused and neglected children from the budget ax. Restore Child Welfare Services funding and protect these vulnerable children from further trauma and devastation.

For questions about this fact sheet, contact Frank Mecca, CWDA Executive Director,
at fmecca@cwda.org or (916) 443-1749.

For information about the Coalition or to get involved, contact Diana Boyer at dboyer@cwda.org or visit
<http://protectourchildrenca.org/>



FACT SHEET

Children, Families of Color Suffer from the Governor's \$133 million Cut to Child Welfare Services

Veto Exacerbates Problem of Disproportionate Representation of Children of Color in the System

In California, and throughout the nation, children of color and their families are disproportionately represented in the child welfare system. This disproportionate representation is highest among African American children but occurs across other groups including Hispanic and Native American populations.

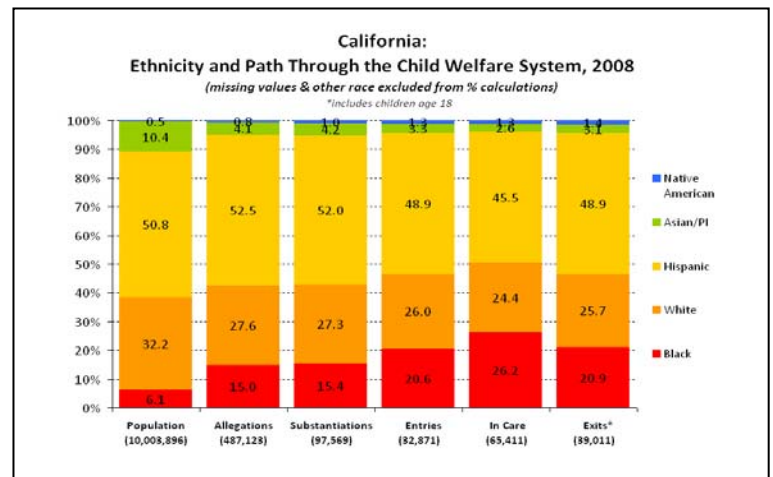
California has made great strides to address the disproportionate representation of children of color in the child welfare system. However, these efforts have recently come under attack by the Governor, who vetoed \$133 million (\$80 million General Funds and \$53 million in matching federal funds) for services to abused and neglected children. The veto threatens efforts across counties to reduce disproportionality in child welfare and ensure children and families of color have equal access to services and achieve positive outcomes.

What does the California data show?

Children of color are disproportionately represented in the child welfare system at all points of contact with child welfare. In other words, children of color are more likely to be referred to child welfare for suspected abuse and neglect, are more likely to have that allegation substantiated, and are more likely to enter foster care and stay in care longer. Research also indicates that children of color receive fewer services and have less contact with caseworkers while in care.¹

California data by the Center for Social Services Research, School of Social Welfare, U.C. Berkeley and based on county CWS/CMS reporting illustrates this disparity:²

As the data shows for 2008, 6.1 percent of California's children are black, yet black children comprised 15 percent of allegations to Child Protective Services (CPS) hotlines. Similarly, 52.5 percent of referrals to CPS were Hispanic children, but Hispanics constitute 50.8 percent of California's child population. On the other hand, 32.2 percent of California's children are white, yet just 27.6 percent of referrals to CPS were for white children.



The overrepresentation of children of color increases at later points in the child welfare continuum for African American and Native American children, but decreases for Hispanic children. African American children also remain in care longer than white children. Hispanic children and families comprise the largest percentage overall of children served in the child welfare system.

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Research points to several factors that may explain the disproportionate representation of children of color in the child welfare system. These include racial bias and inconsistent decision making by community partners who refer for suspected abuse and neglect, and by social workers working with abused and neglected children and families.³ Other likely factors include poverty, living in impoverished neighborhoods, and single parent status.⁴ In addition, systemic issues also play a role, such as high workloads and staff turnover, lack of cultural sensitivity and knowledge, and access to quality prevention and early intervention services.

California's child welfare programs show progress in serving children, families of color.

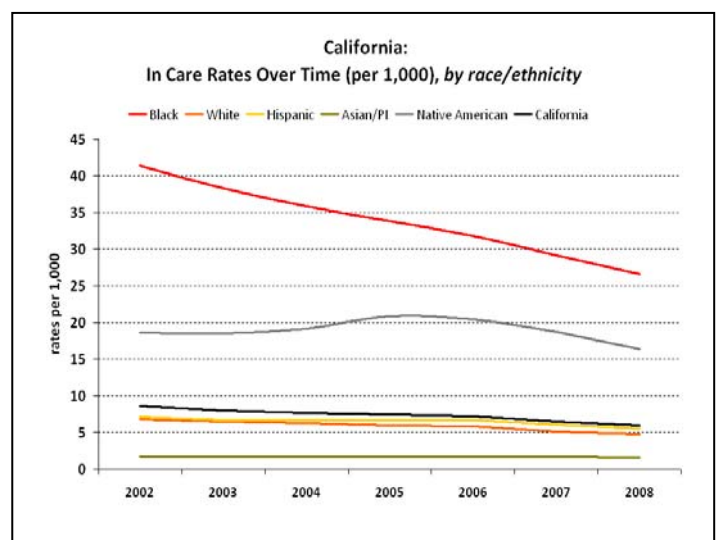
Child welfare agencies are making progress to address the disproportionate representation of children and families of color in the child welfare system through various strategies and efforts. For example:

- **Differential Response:** Prevention-oriented services offered in partnership between child welfare services and community-based agencies and targeted in impoverished neighborhoods with high incidents of abuse and neglect referrals.
- **Team-Based Decision Making:** Process used by counties to divert children from entering foster care through team-based meetings that involve caseworkers and their supervisors, birth families, community members, resource families, and service providers.
- **Kin Guardianship Assistance Program (KinGAP) and Kinship Supportive Services Program (KSSP):** KinGAP subsidizes placements with relatives who assume legal guardianship of foster children, while KSSP provides community-based supports and services for kin caregivers. Kinship care helps foster children preserve family connections and supports cultural norms that rely on extended family for supports.

State and county investments in these and other strategies are starting to take hold. Since 2000, California's foster care population has plummeted, dropping 45 percent to 66,000 in 2009.⁵

As the chart shows, black children comprised the largest share of the foster care caseload reduction, dropping by nearly 36 percent between 2002 and 2008. In addition, the percentage of Black children who had been in care for two years or more dropped from 69 percent to 59 percent.⁶

While positive strides have been made, challenges remain. Black children are still five times more likely than white children to be foster care,⁷ and more attention is needed to reduce disparities at the "front-end" of the system.



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Governor's \$133 million veto will reverse progress, children of color at highest risk.

Efforts to address racial disproportionality are undermined by the Governor's \$133 million veto in child welfare services. A survey by the County Welfare Directors Association of California (CWDA) found over 600 social workers were cut as a result of the veto.⁸ The result is fewer services to abused and neglected children and their families, and children are not receiving the attention they need from social workers due to high workload and fewer staff.

The survey also found counties have cut services that help children recover from maltreatment and heal broken families. Reduction in services such as substance abuse treatment, mental health, and parenting skills and support are especially harmful for children of color who live in impoverished communities. These communities often lack critical supports and services, and the low-income families most often served by child welfare programs lack the resources to afford these services on their own. In addition, many counties have cut community-based prevention and early intervention services offered to all families living in economically-distressed communities, including home visiting, kinship care, and differential response programs.

Ultimately, the veto means abused and neglected children remain in potentially life-threatening situations, languish longer in the foster care system, and are robbed of any hopes for a better life and future.

URGE IMMEDIATE ACTION: RESTORE FUNDING FOR ABUSED, NEGLECTED CHILDREN

The cut to child welfare services has a direct and negative impact on services to abused and neglected children. Because children of color and their families are disproportionately represented in the child welfare services system, the cut to services and funding has a profound impact on this population. We therefore urge the Legislature and Governor to restore funding for abused and neglected children of California.

Protect Our Children. Protect Our Future. is a broad-based coalition of organizations and individuals committed to protecting California's abused and neglected children. For more information, visit www.protectourchildrenca.org. For questions about this fact sheet, contact Frank Mecca, Executive Director, County Welfare Directors Association of California (CWDA) at fmecca@cwda.org or (916) 443-1749.

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¹ Race Matters Consortium (2003). Kinship Care: Meeting the Needs of Children and Families of Color, Freundlich, M., Morris, L., Hernandez, C. Child Welfare Watch. (1998). Child removals: Dislocating the black family, *Child Welfare Watch*, 20,3, 4-7; Barth, R.P. (1997). Effects of age and race on the odds of adoption versus remaining in long-term out-of-home care. *Child Welfare*, 76-285-308.

² Needell, B., Webster, D., Armijo, M., Lee, S., Dawson, W., Magruder, J., Exel, M., Cuccaro-Alamin, S., Williams, D., Zimmerman, K., Simon, V., Hamilton, D., Putnam-Hornstein, E., Frerer, K., Lou, C., Peng, C. & Moore, M. (2010). *Child Welfare Services Reports for California*. Retrieved 5/15/2010, from University of California at Berkeley Center for Social Services Research website. URL: <http://cssr.berkeley.edu/ucb_childwelfare>

³ Lemon, Andrade, Austin, (July 2005), Bay Area Social Services Consortium. Understanding and Addressing Disproportionality in the Front End of the Child Welfare System

⁴ Hines et al., 2002; Jargowsky, 2003; Kingsley & Pettit, 2003

⁵ Danielson and Lee (2009) *Foster Care in California: Achievements and Challenges*, Public Policy Institute of CA.

⁶ Needell et al, 2010.

⁷ Danielson and Lee, 2009.

⁸ Protect Our Children. Protect Our Future. (2010) *Fact Sheet: Children, Families Suffering Under Child Welfare Cut*.