

# Yolo Supervisors OK draft document for child welfare services



Matt Rexroad

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Yolo Supervisors have taken action to address concerns about the local Child Welfare department.

Tuesday morning the Board adopted an interim draft bypass policy and procedure to improve one aspect of public scrutiny.

The agency has come under fire recently after Supervisor Matt Rexroad made an impassioned speech, pointing out significant departmental defects.

The rest of the Board decided to take action after being moved by both Rexroad's pleas and those of foster parents who spoke at recent meetings, echoing the same concerns.

A subcommittee was formed in order to address the problems within a series of workshops.

Tuesday morning, the committee came back with an interim draft policy intended to define the department's responsibilities when a bypass of family reunification is possible under state law.

According to draft documents, a state law passed in 1997 mandates that the juvenile court order social workers to provide reunification services to parents after their child has been removed from their care.

There are 17 bypass exceptions ranging from a parent having a significant history of drug abuse to having committed a violent felony.

The draft policy asks that bypass exceptions be recommended if there is clear and convincing evidence that reunification services may create a risk of re-abuse.

The policy also calls for a new procedure for bypass-eligible cases.

According to draft documents, the Child Welfare Department must consult with the Yolo County Counsel Office to verify whether one of the 17 exceptions to reunification legally apply to one or both parents, then, the bypass decision for each case will be in the hands of a bypass team — the assigned social worker, two social worker supervisors and a department manager.

The team would also conduct a “rigorous, balanced assessment” that addresses key issues and the department director will personally sign off on each case recommendation.

The policy also asks that the department report information to the Board in any case where one of the reunification exceptions apply to increase department transparency while still protecting the children's right to privacy.

The Board moved to adopt the policy, but acknowledges that much more will need to be fleshed out in subcommittee workshops.

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Rexroad referred to the draft policy as “window dressing” and still argues that the department needs new leadership.

He argues that the Board policy suggests a distrust in the department's ability to do its job and also that many of the key issues he brought up in past discussions have not been addressed by the document.

Supervisor Jim Provenza reminded Rexroad that the issues at hand are complicated and that each component will be addressed in separate meetings and workshops.

The Board passed the draft 3-2 — Supervisors Rexroad and Duane Chamberlain dissenting — and also mentioned the intent to include other stakeholders, such as Yolo CASA and the dependency court, in future discussions.

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