

County Child Welfare Data Resources Antiquated, Inefficient, Grand Jury Finds
Grand Jury calls for dedicated data-analytic team to guide social worker efforts

(Woodland, California) – Child welfare authorities, county supervisors and the general public will continue to be blindsided by reports of sudden crises involving abused and neglected children – and will be hampered in their ability to prevent such crises -- unless the county improves its data analysis resources, according to a Yolo County Grand Jury report released today.

The report notes that since the highly publicized death of 19-day-old Justice Rees in Knights Landing in 2015, six more Yolo County children have died at the hands of their parents, even as the county has expanded its staff of social workers. The county has also seen dramatic spikes in the past three years in the number of reports of severe child abuse, the number of children removed from their homes due to maltreatment, and the foster care reentry rate (the rate at which children are sent home from foster care only to be abused or neglected again within a year).

The report recommends that the Yolo County Board of Supervisors fund a data analytics unit within the Child, Youth and Family Branch of the Yolo County Health and Human Services Agency that would give social workers the information they need to proactively prevent child maltreatment and reduce safety risks in children’s homes.

“The Grand Jury found that the child welfare program can’t shift from a reactive mode to a proactive mode without the ability to detect trends early or evaluate the effectiveness of services,” said Judy Wohlfrom, foreperson of the 2017-18 Grand Jury. “We hope this report will be useful for decision makers as they determine how to use current and future resources as wisely as possible.”

The Grand Jury also recommended that the Child, Youth and Family Branch create a website dashboard that would report on key indicators such as reentry to foster care, child abuse and maltreatment within foster care, and time to permanency, or the time it takes for a foster child to be reunited with his or her family or placed for adoption.

Current data systems are so antiquated and slow that when the Board of Supervisors held a series of hearings in 2016 designed to guide reforms of the child welfare branch, the fact that foster-care reentry rates were on track to double was not known and would not become apparent until the following year. Because reentry was not on officials’ radar, the hearings did not directly address the issue.

The Child, Youth and Family Branch is required by multiple state and federal laws to collect a broad array of information about each case. The branch enters this data into a 20-year-old system developed and mandated by the state.

Entering the data requires nearly 50 percent of a social worker’s time, and interpreting the collected data is difficult. For example, Child, Youth and Family Branch staff recently completed a review of 30 foster care reentry cases in an effort to understand why the reentry rate had

2017-2018 YOLO COUNTY GRAND JURY NEWS RELEASE

doubled. That review required about five hours per case, the equivalent of four weeks of a staff member's time.

With better data resources, such a review would take about 30 minutes per case, according to branch staff estimates.

Modern data analytics capabilities also could help social workers determine which families require special attention based on risk factors for negative outcomes, the Grand Jury noted.

And better technology could help to prevent avoidable problems. For example, group homes do not keep a foster child if the psychotropic medication prescribed for that child runs out and the order for the medication has expired. An automatic alert could help social workers ensure that medication orders remain current.

The Grand Jury noted that children who survive abuse or neglect suffer adverse outcomes throughout their lives, including impaired physical and mental health; poor school outcomes; and impaired performance as parents, with long-term effects on the next generation of children.

The full range of effects of child abuse and neglect cost the county hundreds of thousands of dollars a year, not only for short-term social service interventions, but also for subsequent costs in terms of health care, school failure, drug abuse and treatment, and crime.

The full report will be posted online on the Grand Jury's website:

<http://www.yolocounty.org/business/community/grand-jury/yolo-county-grand-jury-reports>

About the Yolo County Grand Jury

The Yolo County Grand Jury is made up of 19 citizens selected by the Yolo County Superior Court. Jurors serve one-year terms that conclude on June 30 each year. In addition to advising the county District Attorney on whether to bring indictments in select criminal cases, the Yolo County Grand Jury also conducts an annual inquiry into the condition and management of public jails and serves as a citizen watchdog over public offices and agencies within the county.

Yolo County residents who are interested in participating on the Grand Jury may learn how to apply at www.yolocounty.org/business/community/grand-jury.

How to file a complaint with the Grand Jury

Residents who have a complaint or concern about a public official or entity can download an application here: <https://yolocountyca.seamlessdocs.com/f/CitizensComplaintForm>. Complaint forms are also available at the county courthouse, county jail facilities and local libraries, or can be requested by calling (530) 406-5088 or writing to the Grand Jury, P.O. Box 2142, Woodland, CA 95776. Completed complaint forms, including any relevant evidence, should be mailed to P.O. Box 2142, Woodland, CA 95776 or emailed to grandjury@sbcglobal.net.