

May 10, 2016

The Honorable Holly Mitchell, Chair
Senate Budget Subcommittee No. 3
State Capitol, Room 5080
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Support to Children who are Commercially Sexually Exploited: \$19.7 million

Dear Senator Mitchell:

The County of San Benito urges your support to provide an additional \$19.7 million General Funds in fiscal year 2016-17 to protect and serve child victims of commercial sexual exploitation through California's child welfare services system. Commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC) is a national and statewide epidemic that deserves our highest attention. Additional support is needed to enable child welfare agencies to effectively meet new federal mandates and serve the needs of this unique population.

While our county child welfare agency has made strides to serve this population, we have found that CSEC victims suffer from horrific and severe forms of physical, emotional and sexual abuse. This results in severe trauma to the victim that requires intensive services to protect the victim from their perpetrators and help them in their long journey to recovery. Effectively serving the CSEC population requires that services are delivered through a targeted and multi-disciplinary approach.

In our County, we have developed a Tri-County approach (San Benito County, Monterey County and Santa Cruz County) that includes other systems such as law enforcement, probation, education, mental health, public health, local non-profits, and others to leverage resources to serve this population. This approach has allowed for all three counties to more effectively serve CSEC by utilizing a multidisciplinary approach for case management, service planning and the provision of services.

New federal and state mandates require child welfare agencies to develop and implement local protocols to identify foster youth who are victims of CSEC and link these youth to appropriate services. While our county has taken steps to begin to serve CSEC victims through the development of local interagency response protocols, additional resources are needed to implement our protocols and effectively serve youth. Once identified, victims need crisis stabilization and often have physical health needs that require immediate attention. They need safe housing with enhanced supervision and support to protect them from their perpetrator. Their perpetrators controlled everything and their victims often were left with nothing of their own, requiring emergency clothing, toiletries, and basic living supplies. Some victims will be saved with their own young children who also need supports and services. These complex cases also require multi-disciplinary teams to meet frequently and quickly to leverage resources and coordinate services, and specially-trained social work staff in the child welfare agency to facilitate this process.

We greatly appreciate the Legislature's and Administration's investment of \$14 million in the 2015-16 budget year to begin to build capacity in local child welfare systems. An increase of \$19.7 million will enable our county to more effectively serve CSEC victims and ensure other counties can join in this important effort.

We thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

Robert Rivas, Chair

cc: The Honorable Bill Monning, CA State Senate
The Honorable Jeff Stone, CA State Senate
County Welfare Directors Association of California