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DEPARTMENT OF
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NEWS RELEASE

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CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES RELEASES STAKEHOLDER REDESIGN OF CHILD WELFARE SERVICES REPORT

-- Bold Transformation Sought; Prevention Emphasized --

Sacramento, CA — Children will be safer, families will be stronger, youth will be supported and services will be more responsive to families and children under an ambitious and far-reaching overhaul of California's Child Welfare Services called the Child Welfare Services (CWS) Redesign.

The CWS Redesign Final Report is the result of three years of hard work by a committed, diverse group of 60 stakeholders representing all facets of the child welfare community. The CWS Stakeholders Group, established through Legislation signed by Governor Davis in 2000, includes former foster youth, social workers, juvenile court judges, mental health experts, representatives from the Legislature, union representatives and child advocates. The Group was charged with the monumental task of reviewing the current child welfare system, which has remained largely unchanged for over 20 years, and making recommendations for its improvement. The CWS Redesign is a comprehensive, integrated approach for transforming California's child welfare system, which includes foster care, adoptions and child protective services.

"Over a period of years, the original vision for supporting and healing families through the Child Welfare system has deteriorated into an adversarial and coercive approach," said Director Rita Saenz. "The Redesign is a multi-year strategy that fundamentally changes how we protect children and strengthen families who come into contact with child welfare services. It is a shift from the traditional approach of serving families after abuse or neglect has occurred to a preventive, community-based approach."

The Redesign outlines ways a variety of stakeholders can support its implementation, a crucial role in the success of the effort. A comprehensive blueprint for action, it serves as a strategic plan for local communities, along with the state's executive, judicial and legislative branches, to improve the lives of all children and families who come into contact with the Child Welfare System. The Redesign focuses on innovative programs like Family Resource Centers, Family to Family, and Wrap-around that are already working in select counties and seeks to implement them on a statewide level.

The Redesign includes:

- Increased focus on prevention of child abuse and neglect
- New intake processes that allow for multi-disciplinary and customized assessment and response
- Community partnerships that promote neighborhood involvement in caring for at-risk children and share responsibility
- Better supporting foster youth as they transition into adulthood, including a “guaranteed preparation package” at age 18 and a life-long connection with a caring adult
- Standardized approaches that assure equity and reduce the disproportional representation of African American and Native American children in the CWS system
- Workforce training and support with a focus on manageable caseloads

A key aspect of the CWS Redesign features a continuous review that measures progress toward outcomes set in the California Program Improvement Plan mandated by the federal Children and Family Services Review and monitored through the new California Child Welfare Outcomes and Accountability System. Key outcomes, monitored quarterly, that will be measured to ensure that Redesign is on track include:

- Fewer children are abused and/or neglected
- Fewer children are in foster care
- Fewer children re-enter foster care
- Children experience fewer placements while in foster care
- The length of time to reunify children with parents or care-providers is reduced
- The length of time to achieve adoption is reduced

“No one state or county agency can ever replace the role of a stable family and supportive community,” states Director Saenz, “but we are committed to working with our federal, state and county partners to make funding more flexible, including seeking federal waivers where necessary.”

In addition to working with county partners, the State is collaborating with the philanthropic community to identify additional resources to more fully implement the Redesign. The Foundation Consortium for California’s Children & Youth is leading that effort and has formed a public/private partnership with CDSS to assist with Redesign implementation.

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