

High Social Worker-to-Child Ratios: Bad for the Children. Bad for the County.

Children's Social Workers in the LA County Dept. of Child and Family Services ("DCFS") are striking for child safety. The information below clarifies their bargaining proposals and why they have chosen to take this action.

WHY ARE WE STRIKING?

► Children's Social Workers ("CSW's") are striking because the Board of Supervisors and DCFS refuse to put in their labor contract firm, binding commitments to decrease social workers' shameful caseload numbers, which greatly exceed acceptable industry standards.

THE FACTS

► **FACT:** According to the State's findings in SB 2030 (available at <http://bit.ly/1hKAojA>), the ideal number of cases for best practice social work is 14. Another respected study published in the journal *Social Work* puts the ideal number of cases at 16.

► **FACT:** Under the current contract between DCFS and its social workers, the Department may assign each CSW 31-38 children for long-term supervision and 27-33 for emergency care supervision.

► **FACT:** 679 of 1,035 continuing services social workers are assigned 2 to 3 times the maximum safe number of children's cases each month. Many DCFS social workers are carrying 40 to 50 cases at a given time. Some juggle 60 cases.

In fact, the number carrying more than 31 cases has increased by an

incomprehensible 800% in the last 4 years alone.

► **FACT:** These unbearable caseloads make it impossible for social workers to effectively care for LA County's most vulnerable children. During the month of October, records show that 2,268 at-risk youth were never even seen by a Children's Social Worker because social worker-to-child ratios are too high.

► **FACT:** Children's Social Workers have done everything under the sun to lower staffing ratios. We have testified before The LA County Blue Ribbon Commission on Child Protection.

We went to arbitration, where Retired Judge Samuel Reyes, the court-appointed arbitrator, issued a verdict directing DCFS to obey the social worker-to-child ratios called for in the social workers' contracts. (The ruling can be viewed here: <http://bit.ly/16DqvQa>)

When the County flagrantly ignored Judge Reyes's directive, we filed a lawsuit to lower the ratios. (Read the suit here: <http://bit.ly/1cmlyCx>)

OUR PROPOSALS

► Commit to hire more social workers and lower the social worker-to-child ratio. Put that commitment in writing in our contract.

► Social Workers have proposed in bargaining that the County commit to hire 35 social workers per month for 17 months, for a total of 595 new social workers.

► Social Workers have proposed gradual reductions in social worker-to-child ratios. Instead of juggling 31 children at a time, by 2015 continuing services social workers could care for 21 at a time. Likewise, emergency care Children's Social Workers would see their ratios decrease from 27 to a much more reasonable 18.

THE PROBLEM

► The Board of Supervisors is ignoring the needs of LA's most vulnerable children.

► DCFS and the Board refuse to commit to these—or any other—ratios or plans. Instead, they have offered vague goals. Anyone familiar with the County's past performance on goals and the deaths of ill-defined children knows that ill-defined goals will not protect the children of LA County.

► At a Board meeting on Dec. 3, 2013, Supervisor Mike Antonovich said that the County has allocated money to hire 500 new social workers. Then where are they?

► Last year DCFS hired 105 new Children's Social Workers, but lost 294 due to attrition. There are currently 400 vacant positions in the department and 800 applicants vying for them. For the sake of the children, it's time for the County to commit to new hiring and caseload reductions.