



A Tradition of Stewardship  
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**Board of Supervisors**

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**Belia Ramos**  
Chair

August 15, 2017

The Honorable Mark S. Boessenecker  
Presiding Judge  
Superior Court of California, County of Napa  
825 Brown Street  
Napa, CA 94559

**FILED**

**AUG 21 2017**

Clerk of the Napa Superior Court  
By: C. Baerisa  
Deputy

Dear Judge Boessenecker:

As required by Penal Code Section 933(c), enclosed are responses to the Grand Jury's 2016-2017 Final Reports, "The Napa County Fairgrounds: The County's Orphan Asset," "Napa Child Abuse Hotline (707) 253-4261 or (800) 464-4216," "Juvenile Hall," "Napa County Jail - Where are we headed?" and "Napa Valley Transportation Agency Vision 2040 Plan."

Grand Jury activity takes place over the course of a number of months. The Board acknowledges the members of the 2016-2017 Grand Jury for the time they have devoted in preparing the reports.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Belia Ramos in black ink.

Belia Ramos  
Chair of the Board of Supervisors

**RECEIVED**

**AUG 21 2017**

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NAPA COUNTY  
RESPONSE TO THE GRAND JURY FINAL REPORT ON  
NAPA CHILD ABUSE HOTLINE  
(707) 253-4261 OR (800) 464-4216

**Introduction**

The “Napa Child Abuse Hotline” Report of the 2016-2017 Napa County Grand Jury sets forth nine findings and three recommendations relating to the Napa County Health and Human Services Agency (HHSA) and its Child Welfare Services (CWS) Division. This Memorandum represents the response of the CWS Director and the HHSA Director to the Grand Jury.

We would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the work of this year’s Grand Jury. Throughout our interactions with them, it was apparent they had an interest in the important work of the CWS Division and in making services better and more accessible to the community. They conducted their process in a respectful manner, and it was a pleasure working with them.

**Background**

To provide further context for Grand Jury’s report and the response of the CWS Director and HHSA Director, the following general information about the Napa Child Abuse Hotline (Hotline) is provided:

- The average number of Hotline calls per year is approximately 1,300. This number has remained relatively constant over the years.
- Approximately 28% of Hotline calls are received after-hours (i.e., between 5:00 p.m. and 7:59 a.m., Monday through Friday, and on weekends and holidays).
- The number of Hotline calls received after-hours that require an in-person immediate response averages one per week.

**Findings and Responses**

The nine findings below are taken directly from the Grand Jury’s report, followed by the response of the CWS Director and HHSA Director.

**Finding 1:** The on-call duty rotated among all social workers and supervisors requires answering calls overnight, on holidays, and on weekends, which contributes to burnout.

**Response of CWS Director and HHSA Director:** Agree. The CWS Director acknowledges that after-hours coverage can contribute to staff burnout. However, a critical function and mission of the CWS Division is to keep children safe. One aspect of doing so is through the provision of effective high quality screening of Hotline calls. The CWS Director believes a balance can be achieved through changes in after-hours coverage and scheduling, discussed in further detail in the response to Finding 2 and Recommendation 1, below.

**Finding 2:** Implementation of the new Crisis Stabilization Unit should result in a higher level of screening after-hours incoming calls, resulting in fewer non-appropriate calls being referred to on-call social workers and supervisors.

**Response of CWS Director and HHSA Director:** Disagree. At the time the Grand Jury was deliberating, a review of after-hours coverage of the Hotline was already underway and the idea of the new mental health contract provider operating the Crisis Stabilization Unit (CSU) assuming the screening of after-hours calls was being considered. Since that time, a decision was made to enhance after-hours coverage of the Hotline through scheduling changes and staffing provided by CWS Division staff. This will expand the higher level screening of after-hours calls by qualified staff with expertise and training in child welfare, while resulting in fewer non-appropriate calls being referred to on-call social workers and supervisors. This approach also ensures adherence to the confidentiality laws governing child welfare and who may legally access such records. As an example, only CWS Division staff has the ability to access the state-wide database used for child welfare documentation which contains the information necessary to properly screen Hotline calls.

**Finding 3:** A full and proficient staff at Child Welfare Services contributes to handling referrals sooner and promotes opportunities for staff to have more effective interactions with families.

**Response of CWS Director and HHSA Director:** Agree. It is unclear what is meant by the term "full," however, since the time of the Grand Jury's deliberations the Board of Supervisors (BOS) approved the addition of a new position in the CWS Division's Emergency Response Unit (the unit responsible for receiving hotline calls during normal business hours). This added resource will positively impact the timely response and triaging of referrals. As it pertains to proficiency, as the Grand Jury report indicates, CWS staff has continued to receive training on Safety Organized Practice (SOP), Structured-Decision Making (SDM), and other best practices. The work of child welfare is governed by a complex set of laws and regulations. It is acknowledged that proficient staff is needed to keep children safe and promote effective interactions with families. It is with this reality in mind that, as stated above, a decision was made to expand the after-hours coverage of Hotline calls (i.e., referrals) provided by CWS Division staff. This approach takes advantage of the vast experience and knowledge in child welfare that can only be found in the CWS

Division. This approach also helps to promote consistent screening of referrals and enhances the ability of the CWS Division to provide seamless coverage when referrals are transitioned from after-hours to normal business hours.

**Finding 4:** The public is often hesitant to report suspected child abuse and neglect to the Hotline for fear children will be removed from their families, and therefore may not call in to voice their concerns for child safety.

*Response of CWS Director and HHS A Director:* Agree. The Grand Jury should be applauded for its accurate assessment of how the public often feels in reporting suspected child abuse and neglect. This is an underlying dynamic and reality that the CWS Division routinely encounters – and, it is among the many challenges inherent in the work. With that background in mind, the CWS Division strives to make reporters of child abuse and neglect feel as comfortable as possible. To that end, it is important to note that if a caller (i.e., member of the public) desires to remain anonymous, that, too, is respected since the overarching goal is to obtain information critical to the safety and well-being of children.

Although a more thorough explanation is provided in response to Recommendation 3 – that the CWS Division record Hotline calls – the issue is briefly discussed here since the Grand Jury identified that the public is often hesitant and fearful of making calls to the Hotline. While HHS A appreciates that the Grand Jury’s recommendation is rooted in providing staff training and quality assurance, it disagrees that recording calls is an appropriate solution because of its potential chilling effect. The CWS Division knows firsthand that callers are often very uncomfortable when making Hotline calls. With that realization in mind, there is grave concern that recording Hotline calls runs counter to the goal of promoting an environment that encourages disclosures. Callers may simply refuse to call the Hotline for *further* fear of not wanting their disclosures to be recorded or their identity known. In the end, the ability of members of the public to remain anonymous, and the CWS Division’s ability to provide legally mandated confidentiality to persons who make mandated reports pursuant to the Child Abuse Neglect and Reporting Act (CANRA), would be undermined.

**Finding 5:** Napa Health and Human Services is not active enough in informing the public regarding all aspects of the Hotline.

*Response of CWS Director and HHS A Director:* Agree in part, disagree in part. The Hotline number is readily available via the internet; a primary resource relied upon for accessing information today. As an example, when performing a Google search, the CWS Division’s intranet page, located on the countyofnapa.org website, readily appears and provides the public both the local Hotline number (707) 253-4261 and the toll-free Hotline number (800) 464-4216. Additional outreach regarding reporting suspected child abuse and neglect, including promotion of the Hotline, is conducted at trainings provided throughout the year

at different organizations. It is important to note that the Hotline is not the only mechanism for reports of suspected child abuse and neglect. Members of the public are also always encouraged to call 911 – a number requiring no memorization – or law enforcement directly who, in turn, are legally required to make cross-reports of suspected child abuse and neglect to the CWS Division. That said, the CWS Director agrees that improvements to public awareness can be made. The specific efforts that will be made are addressed in response to Recommendation 2, below.

**Finding 6:** Technology capable of recording calls would be useful to CWS for training purposes and quality assurance.

*Response of CWS Director and HHSA Director:* Disagree in part, agree in part. As explained in the response to Finding 4, above, and Recommendation 3, below, HHSA disagrees that recording calls is an optimal solution. As the Grand Jury has otherwise found, the public is often hesitant to report suspected child abuse and neglect to the Hotline. The CWS Division therefore has an interest in not implementing practices that discourage Hotline calls and thwart the Division's ability to receive anonymous calls from the public at-large. The CWS Director and HHSA Director agree that reviewing Hotline calls would be useful to CWS for training purposes and quality assurance. However, it is believed that can be accomplished in ways that do not heighten the public's fear of reporting. That issue is discussed further in response to Recommendation 3, below.

**Finding 7:** Introducing technology allowing greater flexibility for CWS staff to work off-site would improve job efficiency and satisfaction.

*Response of CWS Director and HHSA Director:* Agree in part, disagree in part. It is unclear what *greater flexibility* and *working off-site* means. However, HHSA promotes and supports job efficiency and satisfaction while ensuring the needs of the public, and the families and children we serve, are always met. In some instances, because services are delivered "in the field" or "in the home," staff's work necessarily extends to off-site locations. Further, given the nature of after-hours coverage, staff often work off-site and are provided with the resources to do so. Staff has increasingly been provided with County-issued iPads for use during business hours and after-hours to remotely access information. The CWS Division will continue to evaluate whether additional technology can provide greater flexibility for staff to work off-site while ensuring services are not compromised and the expectations of the public are met.

**Finding 8:** After-hour calls regarding urgent child safety matters to Napa Child Welfare Workers living outside the County often result in longer response times.

**Response of CWS Director and HHSA Director:** Agree in part, disagree in part. By way of background, Hotline calls, whether received during business hours or after-hours, are triaged and categorized. For those after-hours referrals determined to require an "Immediate Response," it is important to note that *law enforcement is already present at-the-scene*. Therefore, even if a worker lives outside the County, and the response time is commensurate therewith, urgent child safety matters do *not* result in children being in unsafe situations. It is also worth noting that pursuant to Division 31 regulations that govern child welfare services in California, an "Immediate Response" requires an in-person response *within 24 hours*. In Napa County, the CWS Division requires an in-person response *within two hours*. The CWS Director and HHSA Director are unaware of any after-hours "Immediate Response" referrals in which the two hour response time has not been met.

**Finding 9:** The high cost of housing is a major factor resulting in many Napa Child Welfare Workers living outside the county.

**Response of CWS Director and HHSA Director:** The cost of housing may be one of many factors contributing to CWS Division staff living outside the County. However, for some staff, living outside the County is desirable given the nature of the work (i.e., removing children from parental care, terminating parental rights, etc.) and to provide better separation between work life and personal life.

### **Recommendations and Responses**

The Grand Jury's report identified four recommendations, and requested responses from HHSA on three of the four. Those three recommendations are set forth below, taken directly from the Grand Jury's report, followed by the response of the CWS Director and HHSA Director.

**Recommendation 1:** During its initial six months of operation, the Department of Health and Human Services conduct a performance review of the Crisis Stabilization Unit regarding its effectiveness in handling after-hour calls to the Hotline. Results of the review to be reported to the Board of Supervisors no later than June 30, 2018.

**Response of CWS Director and HHSA Director:** Disagree. As stated in response to Finding 2, above, at the time the Grand Jury was deliberating, a review of after-hours coverage of the Hotline was underway and the idea of the new mental health contract provider operating the CSU assuming the screening of after-hours calls was one of many options being considered. Since that time, a decision was made to provide expanded after-hours coverage of the Hotline by CWS Division staff directly. This will be done through scheduling and staffing changes that will allow for CWS Division staff to respond to Hotline calls during peak periods. It will also ensure that such screening is done by CWS Division staff with the

requisite expertise in child welfare and the complex laws and regulations that govern the work. This approach also has the benefit of minimizing hand-offs and related disruption between the work of a contracted mental health provider and CWS Division staff who will continue the child welfare work during normal business hours. And, as stated previously, due to the strict confidentiality laws governing child welfare, only CWS Division staff has the ability to access the state-wide database used for child welfare documentation which contains the information necessary to properly screen Hotline calls.

**Response, Board of Supervisors:** The Board of Supervisors agrees with the CWS and HHSA Directors.

**Recommendation 2:** Department of Health and Human Services develop a detailed plan of outreach to increase public awareness of the Hotline. This will include, but not be limited to, presentations to schools and places of worship, articles for local newspapers, and public service messages on local radio and TV stations, as well as updated written and online materials. Plan to be completed by January 31, 2018, with implementation within six months thereafter.

**Response of CWS Director and HHSA Director:** Agree in part, disagree in part. As stated above in the response to Finding 5, the Hotline number is readily available via the internet. Additionally, the Hotline is promoted at trainings provided throughout the year at different organizations. However, the CWS Director agrees that improvements to public awareness can be made. Over the next six months, the CWS Director will work with the County Public Information Officer to increase public awareness of the Hotline. The CWS Director will also partner with the Napa Child Abuse Prevention Council (CAPC) (the entity charged with organizing and implementing child abuse prevention activities) to promote awareness of the Hotline. Further, the CWS Director will partner with CAPC to expand mandated reporter trainings throughout the community, which, in turn, promotes awareness of the Hotline and the reporting process for suspected child abuse and neglect.

**Recommendation 3:** Department of Health and Human Services evaluate technology currently in use, including the ability to record calls, track staff schedules, and accommodate off-site staffing. Upgrades determined to be worthwhile and cost effective are to be included in budget requests to the Board of Supervisors for Fiscal year 2018.

**Response of CWS Director and HHSA Director:** Disagree in part, agree in part. As stated in the response to Finding 4 (the public being hesitant to call the Hotline) and Finding 6 (using technology to record Hotline calls), the CWS Director and HHSA Director disagree that Hotline calls should be recorded. However, since the goal of recording is to provide staff

training and quality assurance, the CWS Director believes this can instead be achieved by supervisors directly participating in Hotline calls, when appropriate for staff training and development, and/or periodically monitoring Hotline calls for quality assurance. This process helps ensure that the experience for callers is a respectful one designed to promote disclosures and minimize fear. It also has the advantage of providing training and quality assurance in real time versus through a retrospective process.

As stated in response to Finding 7 (staff technology to work off-site), staff has increasingly been provided with County-issued iPads for use during business hours and after-hours to remotely access information. The CWS Division will continue to evaluate what additional technologies exist to support the work of staff in the field.

It is unclear what the Grand Jury's means by technology to "track staff schedules," however, the CWS Division currently uses various systems to track staff schedules, including an after-hours calendar, an on-duty calendar, an Emergency Response Unit calendar, and an in/out white board. The CWS Director will consider whether any technology to automate these tracking mechanisms would be useful to the CWS Division.

As of the drafting of this response, no specific technology upgrades have been identified that require inclusion in the Fiscal Year 2017-2018 budget, which has already been approved by the BOS in June 2017. Staff who need County-issued iPads have been provided them, and the CWS Division is able to meet any additional iPad needs within its existing budget.

**Response, Board of Supervisors:** The Board of Supervisors agrees with the CWS and HHSA Directors.

**Recommendation 4:** Napa County Board of Supervisors continue efforts to promote development of affordable housing within Napa County and show evidence of such action by means of public notice and/or documents by December 31, 2017.

**Response, Board of Supervisors:** The Board of supervisors agrees with this recommendation. At the regular meeting of September 12, 2017, the Board will discuss available resources within the Housing Fund, and housing needs and priorities.