

RESPONSE TO GRAND JURY REPORT

Report Title: Humboldt County Child Welfare Services and the Courts: Late Reports, Dysfunctional Systems, and Traumatized Children

Report Date: April 27, 2023

Response by: Humboldt County Board of Supervisors

FINDINGS

1. The county agrees with the findings numbered: **6, 9, 17, and 21.**
2. The county partially agrees with the findings numbered: **1, 3, 4, 7, 12, and 19.**
3. The county disagrees with the findings numbered: **2, 5, 8, 10, 11, 13, 14, 15, 16, 18, 20, and 22.**

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Recommendations numbered **1, 2, 3, 12 and 17** have been implemented.
2. Recommendation number **8** requires analysis.
3. Recommendations numbered **4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14, 15, 16, 18 and 19** will not be implemented.

Date: _____ Signed: _____

Number of pages attached: 15



COUNTY OF HUMBOLDT

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

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INTEROFFICE MEMORANDUM

TO: HUMBOLDT COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
FROM: COUNTY ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE
SUBJECT: RESPONSE TO 2022-23 GRAND JURY REPORT "HUMBOLDT COUNTY CHILD WELFARE SERVICES AND THE COURTS: LATE REPORTS, DYSFUNCTIONAL SYSTEMS, AND TRAUMITIZED CHILDREN"
DATE: JULY 18, 2023

Intro language:

In the Grand Jury Report, "*Humboldt County Child Welfare Services and the Courts: Late Reports, Dysfunctional Systems, and Traumatized Children*" the Grand Jury has requested that the Humboldt County Board of Supervisors respond to Findings 1 through 22 and Recommendations 1 through 19. I am proposing the following responses as detailed below.

FINDINGS

Finding 1: *The Humboldt County Department of Health and Human Services' Child Welfare Services Branch is understaffed, with only 64% of positions filled as of January 2023. This causes delays in providing services to children and families.*

Response: Partially Agree

Although there are some unfulfilled positions at CWS, the staff currently working at CWS are diligently putting forth their best efforts to ensure that the services provided to children and families are executed with minimal delays.

Finding 2: *Using their current methods, Child Welfare Services has been unsuccessful in recruiting new workers, contributing to missed opportunities to attract new employees and understaffing.*

Response: Disagree

CWS has been successful in finding new staff with their recruitment efforts.

It should be noted that all Merit System Services (MSS) positions, including Social Service Aides, Social Workers, and Social Worker Supervisors, must be administered by the California Department of Human Resources (CalHR). Since January 1, 2023, the County of Humboldt has observed delays with CalHR recruitment components due to new requirements they have implemented.

Additionally, the county has historically experienced challenges attracting potential employees from out of the area due to limited housing availability, which is a common issue for all county departments.

Finding 3: Understaffing at Child Welfare Services leads to high caseloads and low worker morale, contributing to high worker turnover and a lack of experienced workers.

Response: Partially Agree

CWS will not hire unqualified employees who lack experience required for their positions. The inability to fill all open positions in the department does contribute to a higher caseload for the employees at times.

Finding 4: Child Welfare Services employs Social Services Aides, Social Workers, Social Worker Supervisors, and other employees who demonstrate a genuine passion for the work of improving the lives of children but suffer from repeated moral injuries and burnout.

Response: Partially Agree

CWS employees demonstrate a genuine passion for the work they do. Although, there may be CWS employees that may experience “burnout” there is no data to indicate Humboldt County CWS has a higher percentage of these challenges than any other CWS department statewide.

There are resources available to all county employees in need of extra support through the county’s Employee Assistance Program (EAP). This program provides support to staff facing a variety of challenges including but not limited to work, family, or finances. This is a free and anonymous resource for all staff in need of extra support.

Finding 5: The stress due to understaffing and overwork has led to a rise in health-related absenteeism for employees of the Child Welfare Services Court Unit.

Response: Disagree

There is no data confirming that the stress due to “understaffing” and alleged “overworking” has led to a rise in “health-related absenteeism.”

The Department of Health & Human Services (DHHS) Employee Services (ES) team tracks employee medical leave for the Child Welfare Services (CWS) division. Tracking does not include the individual’s unit within CWS nor whether the leave was related to stress.

The number of vacant positions in CWS increased by 5% from January 2022 to January 2023, contributing to a staffing shortage. ES records indicate that during that timeframe, the percentage of CWS employees on an

approved medical leave ranged from 5% to 10.5%. DHHS provides approved medical leaves to employees who are eligible under one or more of the following: the Family Medical Leave Act, California Family Rights Act, California Pregnancy Disability Leave, or the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for their bargaining unit.

As previously noted, there are resources available to all county employees in need of extra support through the county's Employee Assistance Program (EAP). This free and anonymous resource provides support to staff facing a variety of challenges including work, family, and finances.

***Finding 6:** Child Welfare Services employs recently graduated Social Workers from California Polytechnic State University, Humboldt, using the California Social Worker Education Center Title IX-E program. They do not use this program in cooperation with any other universities. This results in missed opportunities to recruit and sponsor new Social Workers.*

Response: Agree

While the county agrees with this finding, there are other methods of recruitment being incorporated for CWS positions in addition to Title IX-E program recruitment efforts at Cal Poly Humboldt.

***Finding 7:** Applications for new county employees within Child Welfare Services takes longer to process than necessary, resulting in some interested and capable workers choosing to abandon the process and seek employment elsewhere.*

Response: Partially Agree

Due to the facts stated below, the Humboldt County Department of Human Resources, DHHS ES, and CWS has no control over the application process. There is no data available to determine if the process takes longer than any other department, or if capable workers abandon the process at CWS.

A large majority of Child Welfare Services positions are considered Merit System Services (MSS) positions, including Social Service Aides, Social Workers, and Social Worker Supervisors. The County of Humboldt is designated as an Interagency Merit System (IMS) county. As an IMS county, all recruitments for MSS positions must be administered by the California Department of Human Resources (CalHR). CalHR receives all MSS job applications, screens for minimum qualifications, develops and scores the examination, and sends the eligible list of passing candidates to DHHS Employee Services.

CalHR has stated, “MSS works to provide eligible lists within the established timeframes, but timeframes are heavily dependent on several varying factors. Further, for job openings with a closing date, the selection process cannot begin until the posting closes.”

Since January 1, 2023, the County of Humboldt has observed delays with CalHR recruitment components due to new requirements they have implemented. CalHR is responsible for notifying candidates of their status at each step, however, DHHS Employee Services has received feedback from candidates that there are often long periods without notice from CalHR about their recruitment status. DHHS Employee Services is not privy to the contact information or applications for MSS applicants until they are placed on an eligible list, and therefore, is unable to notify candidates when delays are observed.

Given recent delays in the recruitment process administered by CalHR, the County of Humboldt contacted CalHR MSS Management for their input regarding this finding. In response they stated, “MSS currently works to review and process applications within our established service timeframes. Occasionally, we are required to reach out to candidates to request additional information or documentation, which may delay the process.”

***Finding 8:** Applications for employment in Child Welfare Services are accepted for short periods of time and only two or three times per year. This results in potential workers who might be interested in employment not applying for these jobs.*

Response: Disagree

Due to the facts stated below, CWS has no control over the application process. There is no data available to determine if applications are accepted less frequently than any other department, or if potential workers are not applying for these jobs.

Given recent delays in the recruitment process administered by CalHR, the County of Humboldt contacted CalHR MSS Management for their input regarding this finding. In response they stated, “The county specifies the length of time to post each position and has the discretion to choose longer posting timeframes or establish continuous postings.”

CWS and DHHS Employee Services coordinate to include a desired posting timeframe with their recruitment request to CalHR. As of January 1, 2023, CalHR implemented two new requirements:

1. Each recruitment must have at least one competitive examination, and
2. Continuous recruitments posted for more than one year are no longer permitted.

CalHR did not provide guidance for how competitive examinations would be administered for continuous recruitments that would require multiple rounds of examinations. Additionally, this meant that all MSS recruitments posted for a year or longer were required to be closed and the County of Humboldt would have to submit new recruitment requests to re-open.

***Finding 9:** Child Welfare Services web pages do not include any mentions of or links to open jobs, leading potential new employees to believe these positions are not available.*

Response: Agree

Job information is not posted on departmental web pages. All Child Welfare Services recruitments are posted on the County of Humboldt’s website, under “Employment Information,” “Current Job Openings with the County of Humboldt,” and can be found at: <https://humboldt.gov/2076/Job-Opportunities>

***Finding 10:** Open positions for Social Workers in Child Welfare Services can only be applied for through a State of California portal that is not referenced in any County of Humboldt web pages. This leads potential new employees to believe that positions are not available even when applications are being accepted.*

Response: Disagree

All Child Welfare Services recruitments are posted on the County of Humboldt’s website, under “Employment Information,” “Current Job Openings with the County of Humboldt,” and can be found at: <https://humboldt.gov/2076/Job-Opportunities>

Finding 11: The Child Welfare Services Court Unit regularly receives newer employees in the Social Worker I and II classifications. Upon achieving the status of Social Worker III, after two years of experience, these employees are rotated to new assignments, creating a perpetual training cycle and inefficiencies in worker output.

Response: Disagree

Child Welfare Services has no policy or standard practice of placing newer employees specifically in the Court Intake Unit, nor does Child Welfare Services have a policy or standard practice of moving social workers out of the Court Intake Unit after two years of experience. Program assignments for social workers are made based on staffing levels, program need, and fit.

Finding 12: Child Welfare Services regularly fails to meet the legally mandated timelines for court filings. This results in court proceedings being extended, to the detriment of children, families, and the court.

Response: Partially Agree

CWS diligently works to complete reports in a timely manner in order to prevent any court proceedings from being extended, however, it does become necessary to do so at times. When court proceedings are extended, it may cause a delay in the disposition of the case prolonging the proceedings for children and families.

Finding 13: When a worker in the Court Unit is absent on leave, on vacation, or the position is unfilled, there is no regular provision to fill the open position. This contributes to a backlog of cases being filed with the court.

Response: Disagree

When staff are on leave or absent, their positions are not vacant and cannot be filled. Supervisors are responsible for maintaining coverage when they have staff on leave or absent. When positions are vacant, program assignments for the Social Worker classification are assigned based on staffing levels, program need and fit.

Additionally, active recruitments are taking place when there are vacant positions. As noted previously, as an IMS county, all recruitments for MSS positions must be administered by the California Department of Human Resources (CalHR). CalHR receives all MSS job applications, screens for minimum qualifications, develops and scores the examination, and sends the eligible list of passing candidates to DHHS Employee Services. Since January 1, 2023, the County of Humboldt has observed delays with CalHR recruitment components due to new requirements they have implemented.

Finding 14: *When Child Welfare Services fails to meet legally mandated timelines for court filings they are not providing the children and families with due process. This could create a federal civil rights violation liability for the County of Humboldt.*

Response: Disagree

All appropriate parties are properly noticed when there is a court date. An untimely report may cause a continuance which will again be properly noticed to all involved parties.

Finding 15: *Court cases initiated by Child Welfare Services involve families in crisis who require interventions and supervision, and sometimes foster homes and adoption, all of which contribute to Adverse Childhood Experiences. Subjecting children to delays in court proceedings can make that trauma more severe.*

Response: Disagree

The county agrees that court cases initiated by CWS involve families in crisis, however the county is not aware of any empirical evidence showing that delays in court proceedings can make childhood trauma more severe. Many children that are involved in the court process do not actually go to court and such court hearings are not discussed with them.

Finding 16: *In recognition of the lack of timeliness in court filings Child Welfare Services has started a Quality Improvement Plan without the inclusion of other stakeholders aside from the court and County Counsel. Excluding major participants in the court process leads to an incomplete evaluation of the problems and potential solutions.*

Response: Disagree

Writing court reports is an internal process and root cause analysis was conducted with staff to formulate strategies and solutions. Additionally, consultation with external stakeholders was sought as needed, including direct consultation with the presiding Judge of the Superior Court of Humboldt County, the Honorable Judge Joyce Hinrichs.

Finding 17: *Monthly Improvement Meetings, involving the court, private attorneys, and CWS have happened regularly in the past but as of April of 2023 are happening sporadically, if at all. This misses an opportunity to have regular discussions on specific issues that can help to streamline the entire court process.*

Response: Agree

Finding 18: *Attorneys who represent children and families in Child Welfare Services cases are effectively prevented from speaking directly with the Social Workers involved in particular cases. This results in delayed or nonexistent communication.*

Response: Disagree

Attorneys who represent children and families in CWS cases routinely send e-mail correspondence to and receive e-mail correspondence from social workers involved in specific cases, while copying the Deputy County Counsel assigned to the case. This is consistent with the ethics rules for attorneys corresponding with represented parties and is also the common practice in other counties.

Finding 19: There are three attorney positions allocated to the County Counsel’s office for specialists in Child Welfare cases, one of which was unfilled as of April 2023. Even when fully staffed there are not enough attorneys in the County Counsel’s office to represent Child Welfare Services in a timely and effective manner.

Response: Partially Agree

One of the three attorney positions allocated to Child Welfare cases was unfilled as of April 2023. While the two attorneys remaining in the department continue to represent CWS effectively despite the high caseload. There will be a new attorney joining the department shortly that will help with the caseload.

Finding 20: The Child Welfare Services Office of the Ombudsperson is vacant, providing no dedicated independent investigator and advocate for complaints from those involved in the Child Welfare System. This creates doubt that complaints are adequately investigated and addressed.

Response: Disagree

The Office of the Ombudsperson has been staffed to always remain fully operational.

Finding 21: When there is an Ombudsperson they report to the Deputy Director who supervises them, who also may supervise areas that are the subject of complaints. This creates the potential for a conflict of interest.

Response: Agree

Finding 22: The Department of Health and Human Services and Child Welfare Services are ultimately overseen by the Humboldt County Board of Supervisors. The Board has no way of receiving independent information on the status of the situation within the dependency court process. Having this information would be critical for the Board of Supervisors to make informed decisions regarding Child Welfare Services.

Response: Disagree

CWS is under California Department of Social Services (CDSS) oversight and has numerous reporting responsibilities to CDSS. The DHHS Director does provide regular and ad hoc updates on CWS activities and functions to the Board of Supervisors and provides information upon request. It should be noted that the DHHS Director has a duty to maintain confidentiality for CWS clients under HIPPA and Welfare and Institutions Code 827, so some information is confidential and therefore cannot be discussed with the Board of Supervisors.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1: *Starting no later than January 1, 2024, Child Welfare Services actively recruit new Social Workers, not just from Cal Poly Humboldt but from universities throughout California. For funding recommendations see the wording below recommendation #4. (F1, F2, F3, F4, F5)*

Response: This recommendation has been implemented.

Recommendation 2: *Starting the academic year 2024/25, Child Welfare Services sponsor all Social Services Aides who show interest and meet minimum requirements through the College of the Redwoods and/or California State Polytechnic University, Humboldt, to earn a Bachelors of Social Work degree. For funding recommendation see the wording below recommendation #4. (F1, F2, F3, F4, F5)*

Response: This recommendation has been implemented.

Recommendation 3: *Starting in time for the 2024/25 academic year, Child Welfare Services sponsor all Social Worker I, II, and III employees who show interest and meet minimum requirements through the California State Polytechnic University, Humboldt, Masters of Social Work program. This will be for those unable to use the California Social Work Education Center Title IX-E program. For funding recommendations see the wording below recommendation #4. (F1, F2, F3, F4, F5)*

Response: This recommendation has been implemented.

Recommendation 4: *By the academic year 2024/25 Child Welfare Services take full advantage of the California Social Work Education Center Title IX-E program by working with universities throughout the state of California. For funding recommendations see the wording below. (F1, F2, F3, F4, F5, F6)*

- **Funding Recommendation:** *The Grand Jury recommends that Child Welfare Services fund the educational expenses listed in R1, R2, R3, R4, R16 and R17 with existing appropriations in the current fiscal year. If current appropriations are not sufficient, the Grand Jury recommends that Child Welfare Services, at its next earliest opportunity, pursue additional funding from an appropriate agency, including state or federal agencies, or submit to the Humboldt County Board of Supervisors, a request for additional funding, sufficient to fund the above recommendations.*

Response: This recommendation will not be implemented.

Child Welfare Services does not have data suggesting that entering into additional California Social Work Education Center Title IX-E contracts and partnerships with universities throughout the state will produce more social workers locally than the current long-standing partnership with Cal Poly Humboldt.

Recommendation 5: Child Welfare Services work with County Human Resources and the Department of Health and Human Services Employee Services to streamline the hiring process so that it takes no more than two months between a candidate's application and a decision by the county. This streamlining process to be in effect no later than April 1, 2024. (F7)

Response: This recommendation will not be implemented.

The County of Humboldt is currently required to run all recruitments for Merit System Services (MSS) positions through the California Department of Human Resources (CalHR) because the County of Humboldt is designated as an Interagency Merit System (IMS) county. A large majority of Child Welfare Services positions are considered MSS positions, including Social Service Aides, Social Workers, and Social Worker Supervisors. As an IMS county, the County of Humboldt has very little say in how the recruitment process must look to recruit for these positions. This includes when recruitments are opened, how often, what the recruitment process will entail, and how long it will take to move the recruitment process forward at each step. Additionally, the County of Humboldt does not receive contact information or applications for MSS applicants until they are placed on the eligible list. This means that MSS applicants must pass CalHR's screening for minimum qualifications, all required examinations, and be placed on the eligible list before the County of Humboldt is able to contact them. This is all driven by CalHR, who has recently implemented new processes and requirements that the County of Humboldt, and many other IMS counties, find to be unnecessary and extremely time consuming.

As of January 1, 2023, CalHR implemented a new requirement to have one competitive examination per recruitment, which must be approved and administered by a CalHR representative. Since the implementation of this requirement, the County of Humboldt has observed delays in recruitment components administered by CalHR. These include delays in communication to candidates regarding their application status, recruitment bulletins not being posted timely, delays in competitive examinations being identified and developed, and inadequate written exam materials being provided to the County of Humboldt. In April 2023, CalHR informed DHHS Employee Services that they would no longer allow master's in social work (MSW) graduates to apply and provisionally qualify for Social Worker IV A-D recruitments within 6 months of their graduation. This practice had been previously allowed by MSS for several years, allowing the County of Humboldt to reduce the time to hire for Title IX-E candidates following the receipt of their MSW. As a result of this, Title IX-E candidates approaching graduation in May 2023 were screened out for Social Worker IV A-D recruitments. This resulted in 2023 Title IX-E candidates being offered temporary positions in the Social Worker III classification, resulting in a lower salary, less benefits, and the requirement to apply and go through another recruitment process for a Social Worker IV A-D position following receipt of their MSW.

CalHR has shown to not be receptive to the feedback that their new processes are hindering the ability of IMS counties to hire. CalHR also has shown to lack appropriate response times when agencies reach out with questions or requests for updates. The message that has been communicated by CalHR is that they will not delegate their authority to IMS counties because they are responsible for administering a merit-based process. The County of Humboldt has observed that these requirements appear to be more stringent than what is regulated under the California Code of Regulations, Title 2, § 17033. Although the county partially agrees with finding F7, the positions that the Grand Jury has identified in this report all fall under this IMS county designation; thus, the recommendation made here cannot be implemented by the County of Humboldt.

The County of Humboldt has, as a result of these issues, began discussing the concept of becoming an Approved Local Merit System (ALMS) county. An ALMS County is approved to manage the recruitment process internally without reliance on CalHR. This is a process of working with CalHR to ensure that the county's policies, practices, and standards meet the requirement that CalHR determines are appropriate. There is no way of telling how long this process might take and what issues CalHR might raise along the way.

After the release of this report, the Director of Human Resources reached out to the MSS Program leadership at CalHR to request they assist the County of Humboldt in responding to these findings and the recommendation. In response they stated, *"Pursuant to Government Code 19800 et. al, The Department of Human Resources (CalHR) is vested with the jurisdiction and responsibility of establishing and maintaining personnel standards on a merit basis and administering merit systems for local government agencies as a condition of a state-funded program or a federal grant-in-aid program established under federal laws. The State of California adopted Local Agency Personnel Standards (LAPS) to implement Government Code Sections 19800 -19811. The Merit System Services (MSS) program ensures that such counties operate a merit-based personnel system for program employees that adheres to the federal merit principles."*

In regard to this recommendation, CalHR stated, *"MSS works to provide eligible lists within the established timeframes, but timeframes are heavily dependent on several varying factors. Further, for job openings with a closing date, the selection process cannot begin until the posting closes."*

Recommendation 6: *The Department of Health and Human Services Employee Services make personal contact with potential employees upon receipt of their application and at regular intervals during the hiring process, keeping them up to date on their status. This practice will be operable no later than November 1, 2024. (F7)*

Response: This recommendation will not be implemented.

Given recent delays in the recruitment process administered by CalHR, the County of Humboldt contacted CalHR MSS Management for their input regarding this recommendation. In response they stated, *"MSS notifies candidates throughout the examination process. When the county receives the eligible list, they are certainly able to maintain contact with candidates and provide continuous status updates."*

DHHS Employee Services has received feedback from candidates that there are often long periods without notice from CalHR about their recruitment status. DHHS Employee Services is not privy to the contact information or applications for MSS applicants until they are placed on an eligible list. Therefore, the County of Humboldt and DHHS Employee Services are unable to notify candidates when delays are observed with recruitment components administered by CalHR.

Recommendation 7: *There be a permanent open application process to create a pool of qualified people for all CWS Social Services Aide, Social Worker, and Social Worker Supervisor positions. This to be in effect no later than January 1, 2024. (F8)*

Response: This recommendation will not be implemented.

Given recent changes and delays in the recruitment process administered by CalHR, the County of Humboldt contacted CalHR MSS Management for their input regarding this recommendation. In response they stated, *"The county may establish continuous job postings to accept applications, however examination processing times will*

remain the same. MSS is currently in the process of developing examinations that will be available online 24/7 to streamline examination administration and allow candidates to obtain eligibility on a continuous basis. This will not be in effect by January 1, 2024.”

CalHR has not provided guidance for how competitive examinations will be administered for continuous recruitments, as those recruitments would require multiple rounds of examinations. CalHR MSS Management has expressed to county Human Resources and DHHS Employee Services that they will not delegate their authority to the County of Humboldt for administering this step.

In May of this year, DHHS Employee Services contacted CalHR to request a status update for three CWS recruitments for Social Worker IV A-D, Social Worker III and Social Worker I/II. The application window for these recruitments all closed between early March and mid-April and were still awaiting administration of next steps by CalHR.

Recommendation 8: *Child Welfare Services increase their internet presence for all job openings. This recommendation to be implemented by November 1, 2023. (F9, F10)*

Response: This recommendation requires analysis.

Applications for MSS recruitments must be submitted through CalHR’s application portal. DHHS Employee Services currently posts MSS recruitments to the County of Humboldt jobs website, directing applicants to CalHR’s application. County of Humboldt postings automatically post to GovernmentJobs.com, Indeed.com, and Monster.com. Additionally, DHHS Media and the County Administrative Office’s Public Information Specialist promotes new DHHS job postings on DHHS and the County of Humboldt’s social media platforms.

In March 2023, CWS advertised their new recruitment postings with the Northern California Association of Nonprofits (NorCAN), a distribution list of approximately 1,000 government and nonprofit agency contacts in the region. On April 28, 2023, CWS and DHHS Employee Services held an initial meeting with UC Davis and a leading expert in the field of child welfare to discuss recruitment and retention strategies for CWS positions. CWS and DHHS Employee Services intend to continue partnering with these contacts and analyzing options for attracting qualified candidates to CWS recruitments, including ways to increase the internet presence for job postings.

Recommendation 9: *The practice of moving Social Workers out of the Court Unit after just a few years cease. Employees should not start their careers in the Court Unit. This procedural change to take place no later than October 1, 2023. (F11, F12)*

Response: This recommendation will not be implemented.

Child Welfare Services currently does not have a policy or standard practice of moving social workers from any unit based solely on years spent in unit.

Recommendation 10: *When an opening is created within the Court Unit a Social Worker from another unit be temporarily assigned until the position can be filled full-time. This practice to be operable no later than October 1, 2023. (F12, F13)*

Response: This recommendation will not be implemented.

The decision to fill any vacancy in any program area, including transferring staff, is based on staffing levels, program need and fit.

Recommendation 11: *The Child Welfare Services Court Unit should be the top priority for full staffing now and into the future. This procedural change to take place no later than October 1, 2023. (F11, F12, F13, F14, F15)*

Response: This recommendation will not be implemented.

Child Welfare Services will prioritize Emergency Response investigative work to ensure timely safety assessments and maintain timely investigations.

Recommendation 12: *Child Welfare Services convene a diverse working group of stakeholders in the Dependency Court process to address quality improvement. These meetings are distinct from those described in R13 in that they will focus on internal Child Welfare Services Quality Improvement Plans. This working group to be convened no later than January 1, 2024. (F16)*

Response: This recommendation has been implemented.

Recommendation 13: *Child Welfare Services should advocate that Monthly Improvement Meetings involving the court, private attorneys, and Child Welfare Services be reinstated. This advocacy to begin no later than October 1, 2023. (F17)*

Response: This recommendation will not be implemented.

This meeting is hosted by the Humboldt County Superior Court. Child Welfare Services will continue to participate and encourage and support key staff and stakeholder participation.

Recommendation 14: *Child Welfare Services and County Counsel enact a blanket exemption to the procedure of Social Workers being required to have County Counsel present whenever they speak with an attorney representing a child or parent. This recommendation to be in place no later than October 1, 2023. (F18)*

Response: This recommendation will not be implemented.

This recommendation will violate California Rules of Professional Conduct 4.2 Communication with a Represented Person) (a) In representing a client, a lawyer shall not communicate directly or indirectly about the subject of the representation with a person the lawyer knows to be represented by another lawyer in the matter, unless the lawyer has the consent of the other lawyer.

Recommendation 15: *The Humboldt County Board of Supervisors fund two additional attorneys assigned to work with Child Welfare Services. For funding recommendations see the wording below recommendation #4. The process of hiring new attorneys to begin no later than December 1, 2023. (F19)*

Response: This recommendation will not be implemented.

While this recommendation has merit, the county's Fiscal Year 2023-2024 budget cannot accommodate this recommendation.

Recommendation 16: *The Humboldt County Board of Supervisors retain a consultant unrelated to Humboldt County Government or Agencies to provide a comprehensive evaluation of and recommendations for Child Welfare Services. This independent consultant to be retained no later than January 1, 2024. For funding recommendations see wording below recommendation #4 (F5, F12, F14, F15, F16, F17, F18, F19, F20, F21, F22)*

Response: This recommendation will not be implemented.

Given the county's budget circumstances for Fiscal Year 2023-2024, there is no funding available to support this recommendation at this time.

Recommendation 17: *By January 1, 2024, the position of Child Welfare Services Office of the Ombudsperson be filled. (F20)*

Response: This recommendation has been implemented.

Recommendation 18: *By April 1, 2024, the Humboldt County Board of Supervisors remove the Ombudsperson position from the Child Welfare Services organizational structure, reallocating the position to the County Administrative Officer, to whom they will directly report. (F21)*

Response: This recommendation will not be implemented.

Child Welfare Services is currently negotiating a contract with California Center for Rural Policy (CCRP) to conduct a review of the Office of the Ombudsperson and for CCRP to review other models/mechanisms used by public agencies for handling concerns or complaints. This review will include conducting an analysis that connects the desired intent and purpose with the actual types of complaints received by the Office of the Ombudsperson in order to assess whether or not the current structure is serving its' intended purpose. The outcome of the review will include recommendations and options to ensure that, through the Office of the Ombudsperson and/or other means, Child Welfare Services has mechanisms in place to respond in a timely and effective manner to complaints or concerns.

Recommendation 19: *The Humboldt County Board of Supervisors create a committee whose sole mission is to independently and accurately evaluate the status of timely court filings by Child Welfare Services. They will report their findings quarterly to the Board of Supervisors. This committee to be operational no later than January 1, 2024. (F22)*

Response: This recommendation will not be implemented.

Child Welfare Services has an internal tracking process and routinely tracks and reports aggregated court report timeliness data to Child Welfare Services Administration and DHHS Administration. The DHHS Director provides regular and ad hoc updates on CWS activities and functions to the Board of Supervisors and provides information upon request. As previously noted, the DHHS Director has a duty to maintain confidentiality for CWS clients under HIPPA and Welfare and Institutions Code 827, so some information is confidential and therefore cannot be discussed publically.