



COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES COMMISSION FOR PUBLIC SOCIAL SERVICES

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AMENDED

VIRTUAL MEETING MINUTES

Thursday, February 16, 2023
12851 Crossroads Parkway South
City of Industry, CA 91746

Please note this is a summary of the meeting not a “verbatim” transcription.

1.0 CALL TO ORDER / ROLL CALL / ESTABLISH A QUORUM

Adele Andrade-Stadler, Chairperson

Meeting was called to order at 10:30 a.m. A quorum was established.

Roll Call/Commissioners Present:

Adele Andrade-Stadler (Chair) (Vice-Chair)	Mihran Kalaydjian
Joe Brown	Summer McBride
Yvonne Chan	Pollyanna Lee
Sue ElHessen	Booker Pearson
	Dynasty Taylor

Commissioners Absent:

Raul Estrada (E)	Mary Galvan Rosas (E)
Michael Flood (E)	Paige Pelonis (U)
Veronica Lewis (E)	

Commission Staff:

La France Toliver
Tina Phan

Introduction of Guests

Jackie Contreras, Ph.D., DPSS	Perla Macias, DPSS
Shawn Luna, County Counsel	Monica Cardenas, DPSS
Nick Ippolito, DPSS	Irene Sitthikhe
Gerry Bonilla, DPSS	Blessing Ugwueze
Anush Gavadian, DPSS	Ted Lu

COMMISSIONERS

Chairperson
ADELE ANDRADE-STADLER

Vice Chairperson
VERONICA LEWIS

JOE BROWN
YVONNE CHAN, Ed.D.
SUE ELHESSEN, Ed.D.
RAUL ESTRADA
MICHAEL FLOOD
MARY GALVAN ROSAS
MIHRAN KALAYDJIAN
POLLYANNA LEE
SUMMER MCBRIDE
BOOKER PEARSON
PAIGE PELONIS
DYNASTY TAYLOR

COMMISSION STAFF

Executive Director
LA FRANCE TOLIVER

Commission Secretary
TINA PHAN

Leonardo Robles, DPSS
Sergio Andrade, DPSS
Adrian Crespo, DPSS
Dennis Morales, DPSS
Kay Seals, DPSS
Eva Aryants, DPSS
Elias Alcaraz, DPSS
Karla Carrington, DPSS
Frank Camargo, DPSS
Yaky Llamas, DPSS
Craig Jackson, DPSS

Wynette Stevens, DPSS
Maricela Soto, DPSS
Winston Ferrer, DPSS
Karen Luna, DPSS
Victor Barillas, DPSS
Tanisha Owens, DPSS
Carmen Zapata, DPSS
Claudia Quintanilla, DPSS
Monica P. Shen, DPSS
Alisa Lieu, DPSS
Rhizza Agojo , DPSS

2.0 REVIEW AND APPROVE MINUTES FROM JANUARY 2023 MEETING

Adele Andrade-Stadler, Chairperson

MOTION: Commissioner ElHessen moved to approve the minutes and Commissioner Commissioner Kalaydjian seconded the motion.

CALL FOR VOTE: Minutes were approved by majority vote as follows:

Adele Andrade-Stadler - Aye	Pollyanna Lee - Aye
Yvonne Chan - Aye	Summer McBride - Aye
Sue ElHessen - Aye	Booker Pearson - Aye
Mihran Kalaydjian - Aye	Dynasty Taylor - Aye

3.0 PUBLIC COMMENT (Non-Agenda Items) / (Agenda Items)

Adele Andrade-Stadler, Chairperson

None.

4.0 DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Jackie Contreras, Ph.D., Interim Director

On behalf of DPSS Executive staff, and management congratulations to our DPSS awardees for your collective and individual efforts, and for the outstanding work you are being recognized for this morning.

Dr. Contreras provided the following updates:

As of February 5, 2023, over \$4 Billion in CalFresh Emergency Allotment (EA) benefits was issued to over 24 million individuals/families in LA County. As a reminder, CDSS has informed us that EA will end in March 2023. As a result, the last month of EA issuance will be for the February month to be issued March 26, 2023.

As of April 2023, all CalFresh households will only receive their regular CalFresh benefits based on their circumstances (household size, gross income, expenses). A mass mailer was sent out to all CalFresh households on January 26 to inform them of this. DPSS and CDSS is outreaching to all customers to provide information on this major change and to encourage the reporting of expenses, which can increase household monthly benefits. The information is being shared via outbound calls, text messages, notices, and through DPSS/CDSS websites.

Prior to the signing of the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2023, the continuous health coverage and the Public Health Emergency (PHE) were tied together, with the expectation that when the PHE ended, the continuous health coverage would end. Instead, the Act delinked the two. This means that the Medi-Cal Renewal process will resume effective April 1, 2023, and anyone not submitting a Medi-Cal renewal packet will be discontinued effective July 1, 2023.

To maximize the continuity of coverage, the processing of renewals will occur over a 14-month period (April 2023 through May 2024). We will collaborate with Managed Care Plans, Community-Based Organizations, and other community-based stakeholders to provide information. Also, information will be shared on the DPSS website, social media platforms, ethnic media, County channels, and on information boards in district offices.

The Board has proclaimed February as National Children's Dental Health Month throughout the County and urge that all residents, schools, and community organizations join in this observance.

The Board has proclaimed Fight for Air Climb Month in support of the event, which encourages County residents and employees to get appropriate screenings, prevent or quit tobacco and e-cigs, advocate for cleaner air and reduce the risk for developing lung disease in downtown Los Angeles on February 26, 2023.

The Board has proclaimed Los Angeles County American Heart Month, affirming the County's commitment to fighting cardiovascular disease; instruct the Director of DPH, in collaboration with the Directors of DHS and Aging and Disabilities, and the Interim Directors of DMH and DPSS, and other relevant Departments, to engage with health plans to promote evidence-based interventions to prevent heart disease.

Although not yet proclaimed by the Board, February is Black History Month. This is an opportunity for us to celebrate the perseverance and achievements of generations of Black Americans, and acknowledge the challenges endured in striving to achieve true justice and equity.

Each year, the Association for the Study of African American Life and History selects a theme for Black History Month. This year's theme, "Black Resistance," was selected to bring focus to how "African Americans have resisted historic and ongoing oppression, in all forms," since the nation's earliest days. A fitting theme to reflect on, especially in challenging times such as these.

I would also like to share information with you about a special event taking place on February 19, 2023, at Earvin “Magic” Johnson Park from 12 pm to 4 pm. “A Healing Space Event,” hosted by our new County Department of Justice, Care, and Opportunities, led by Judge Songhai Armstead, and 2nd District Supervisor Holly Mitchell, will offer an array of services, resources and activities focused on wellbeing and healing. Audre Lorde (February 18, 1934-November 17, 1992), a self-described “black, lesbian, feminist, socialist, mother, warrior, poet” once said, “Caring for myself, is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation and that is an act of political warfare.” I believe attending to your well-being is, in and of itself, a very powerful act of resistance.

I would like to inform you that in January, we successfully relocated four of our business operations to a newly renovated three-story building located at 20101 Hamilton Avenue in the city of Torrance. The new building is located no more than 9.4 miles from the current locations of the four offices and is located along existing public transportation routes. This location will house more than 700 DPSS employees.

The offices relocated were Hawthorne Medi-Cal, Welfare Fraud Prevention & Investigations (WFP&I) Section, In-Home Supportive Services (IHSS) Hawthorne, and In-Home Supportive Services (IHSS) Rancho Dominguez operations.

At our last meeting, there was a question regarding the end of the moratorium and whether there is an impact upon the department.

The Los Angeles City Council formalized its decision to end its COVID-19 Eviction Moratorium on Jan. 31, 2023. However, the Board of Supervisors has voted to extend the countywide renters protections until March 31, 2023. At the end of the moratorium, CalWORKs families could be subjected to eviction if they are not able to pay their current rent and/or past due rents. As such, we anticipate these families will be coming to DPSS to request for housing assistance through DPSS’ prevention programs.

In addition, we noticed the number of families who were assisted with DPSS’ prevention programs in this Fiscal Year 22/23 has gradually increased. We believe the number will continue to rise. DPSS is ready to serve these families with our prevention programs and other available housing resources.

5.0 PSS COMMISSION AWARDS CEREMONY

Adele Andrade-Stadler, Chairperson

Chairperson Adele Andrade-Stadler welcomed all awardees and guests to the 18th Annual Commission Awards Ceremony. The Commission honored 28 DPSS employees for their outstanding achievements in 2022. Each awardee was selected by the Chief Deputies and Bureau Directors. A virtual presentation of all employees was presented by the Chair with write-ups. On behalf of the commission body, she thanked each employee for their commitment to excellence.

6.0 NEW BUSINESS

Presentation: EBT Skimming

Bureau of Special Operations – Program Compliance Division

Nick Ippolito, Bureau Director

Gerry Bonilla, Division Chief

Mr. Ippolito provided the following introductory statement:

EBT skimming or Electronic Benefit Card skimming is an issue that is having a big impact, especially on our CalWORKs families, whereby their benefits are loaded onto their EBT card and when they go to withdraw cash to pay their rent, expenses, or what have you, and the funds are gone. This is an issue that has grown exponentially as criminal enterprises discover the ease by which EBT cards can be compromised, and cash can be stolen. Our department's point person is Gerry Bonilla, the Division Chief over the Program Compliance Division. This division includes our Welfare Fraud Section. His team has been at the tip of the spear of solutions for this issue.

Mr. Bonilla provided the following update:

EBT Skimming continuing to grow as it's a state and nationwide issue. Many of the other counties and states are also experiencing this, but it hits really close to home because LA County has the biggest caseload in the in the state and nation. We see a huge impact here locally and this is touching virtually every part of our department.

Our program policy sections and partners are working diligently to do as much as they can. Our line offices are seeing the impact of this firsthand and they are the ones that are hearing the struggles and the frustrations from our customers and what they are going through. EBT benefit theft occurs when customers benefits are stolen without their knowledge. Benefits are taken directly from their accounts before they can even access them and that can happen in several ways. It can happen through scams that most of us are familiar with such as text, email, and telephone scams where people are trying to get your personal information to try to access personal data and financial accounts. In addition to the text and telephone scams, skimming theft can also happen at ATMs, banks, and retailers, where illegal devices are placed over point-of-sale machines where the card is inserted or swiped the card readers are taking that information. The bad guys are capturing PIN information and in turn, reproduce cards that are used to withdraw the benefits before our customers can even access. These benefits are taken early in the month from what we're seeing, and in 2022, we saw huge losses across the state and county.

Skimming machines at retail locations look like a typical machine that you might encounter at a retail location and is hard to spot, even for the trained eyes. The PIN pads themselves look just like the real devices. The fake is placed over the real device, and many times we're seeing that they distract the cashier before attaching over the real device.

The next example is what you might see at a gas station. The gas station pumps have the same types of scanners. They are a little different in terms of what the base device is and the type of skimmer that is placed over it, but the same concept where they're able to capture that information and create duplicate cards. Like Dr. Contreras and Mr. Ippolito mentioned earlier, we really are trying to do as much as we can. EBT cards are used statewide and there are some weaknesses with these types of cards. We are really pushing CDSS to try to do as much as they can to improve the card security. But in the interim, we are also trying to do as much as we can to try to raise awareness with our customers so they can know how to protect themselves in safeguarding their card information to avoid being victimized.

Most of us have a debit or credit card through our bank. A lot of those cards have the tap to pay technology, but our EBT cards do not. This is part of the challenge to make sure that that customers walk up to these skimming devices, which they are educated best practices on how to identify some of these machines and how to protect themselves.

We are encouraging customers to cover their hand when entering their PIN and looking to see any discrepancies with the device. Sometimes the buttons may be a little off, but we're trying to get as much information as we can to our customers.

We are developing short PSA videos with best practices to help look for some of these discrepancies with the machines and reminders on how they can protect themselves. We are also pushing information out through our own DPSS social media and putting reminders on our platforms, working with our partners sharing as much information as we can. We were doing the same with our outreach to the business community. We want them to also be on the lookout for devices on their end and how they can best protect their devices. Many of us maybe familiar with Costco point of sale devices where they have a little tape over their devices to show that device has been checked showing it has not been tampered with. We are encouraging local retailer to do the same thing to regularly check and inspect their devices, keeping an eye on changes to their machines and contacting law enforcement.

We are also collaborating with the Department of Economic Opportunity, working with the Agriculture Commissioner on disseminating material to try to help spread the word on to our retailers and business community, as well on how they can best protect themselves.

We are also working with our local, State, and federal partners to move the card security piece as quickly as possible. Implementing the CHIP and TAP technology which we have on our own credit cards, will go a long way to try to stop and make it harder for these bad actors to capture and harvest that information.

We are also working with law enforcement partners at multiple levels (federal, State, and local) that not only do the investigative piece to slow this down, but also advocating for additional resources at each of these levels, making stricter penalties for those that are doing the skimming and the EBT theft, working with our local DA, the state Attorney General to prosecute offenders.

Dr. Elhessen suggested direct deposit into bank accounts. Response: for cash benefits direct deposit is currently an option, however, there is still a need to protect EBT card to access CalFresh benefits. We are looking to see how we can best share more information about direct deposits and how beneficial it is. Another challenge is that many of our participants may not have personal bank accounts. We are working with the Department of Consumer and Business Affairs to see what resources may be out there for free or low-cost checking and savings accounts, making sure our customers are not hit with overdraft fees.

Chairperson Andrade Stadler asked if the department thought of setting up a hotline for participants to call and report their loss to a direct line for tracking, to weed out possible fraudulent reports (i.e. PIN sharing) of skimming before referrals are made to law enforcement? Response: We can go back and see how that might work, but one of the primary things that we're really focused on is to be able to assist our customers as quickly as possible when they do become victimized. We need to take immediate action to cancel their old EBT card and reissue a new one. Our teams are working with our line offices and customer service centers on how to best expedite that process. We want to make sure that this does not get lost in the shuffle but point well taken.

The Chairperson asked how as commissioners can we help bring this to light. For example, we can share with our own media connections to warn people. Response: We are working very closely with CDSS. We continue to advocate through CDSS. We're also working with our CEO Legislative Affairs Intergovernmental Relations to advocate through our delegation of representatives, both in Sacramento and Washington D.C., to that extent might be an avenue we can partner on.

Chairperson thanked Mr. Bonilla for his informative presentation on EBT Skimming and asked how can the Commission help? Mr. Bonilla stated we continue to work very closely with our CEO-Legislative Affairs and CDSS, to try and advocate through our delegation of representatives both in Sacramento and Washington, D.C.

The Chairperson open the floor for a motion to exploring actions of support against EBT Skimming through local and state and federal legislation. Commissioner Kalaydjian approved and Commissioner McBride seconded.

Chairperson Andrade Stadler called for the vote:

Adele Andrade-Stadler - Aye	Summer McBride - Aye
Mihran Kalaydjian - Aye	Booker Pearson - Aye
Yvonne Chan – Aye	Dynasty Taylor - Aye
Sue ElHessen - Aye	

Ms. Toliver stated six commissioners voted, motion failed since our quorum was lost.

Chairperson Andrade Stadler stated we will revisit this in March and hope that we can get some attention and recognition to this incredibly important subject. She thanked Dr. Contreras and staff for their presentation.

7.0 CHAIR'S REPORT

Adele Andrade-Stadler, Chairperson

On March 16, we will be back on track to discuss CalWORKs Supportive Services and Key Collaborations (Part 2).

8.0 ADJOURNMENT

Meeting adjourned at 11:50 p.m.