



COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES COMMISSION FOR PUBLIC SOCIAL SERVICES

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Commission Secretary
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MEETING MINUTES

Thursday, October 19, 2023

Location #1: Exposition Park District
3833 S. Vermont Avenue, 3rd Floor, Conference Room B
Los Angeles, CA 90037

Location #2: ElHessen Home Office
9433 Ives Street
Bellflower, CA 90706

Location #3: Porter Ranch Library
11371 Tampa Ave,
Porter Ranch, CA 91326

Location #4: Manhattan Beach Library
1320 Highland Avenue Room B
Manhattan Beach, CA 90266

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 10:10 a.m. The Chair opened the meeting stating the following, we acknowledge the First peoples upon whose land the County of Los Angeles now sits at public meetings is a first but meaningful step that we, as a County family, can take to build positive relationships and advance truth, healing, and transformation with the County’s local Tribes and American Indian and Alaska Native community.

Commissioners ElHessen, Kalaydjian, and Pearson attended the meeting from an alternate location under the Brown Act Teleconferencing rules. A quorum was established at 10:10 a.m.

Roll Call/Commissioners Present:

Adele Andrade-Stadler (Chair)	Pollyanna Lee
Sue ElHessen, Ed.D. (Vice Chair)	Summer McBride
Yvonne Chan, Ed.D.	Booker Pearson
Sam Joo	Dynasty Taylor
Mihran Kalaydjian	Andrew Yam

Commissioners Absent:

Joe Brown
Michael Flood

Mary Galvan Rosas
Veronica Lewis

Commission Staff:

La France Toliver
Tina Phan

Introduction of Guests

Jackie Contreras, Ph.D., DPSS
Roobina Gerami, DPSS
Shawn Amiel, DPSS

Julia Almanzan, County Counsel
Shawn Luna, County Counsel

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

Adele Andrade-Stadler, Chairperson

Shawniqua Bong Quisha spoke on Agenda Item 5 regarding CalFresh policy and its effects on their case and spoke on under non-Agenda item concerning their CalFresh and how the program should be helping all who need it. Shawniqua Bong Quisha was given 3 minutes on each topic.

3.0 DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Jackie Contreras, Ph.D., Director

Dr. Contreras provided an update on the following topics:

The Board Made the following Proclamations in the month of October: "Disability Employment Awareness Month", "Domestic Violence Awareness Month" "LGBTQ+ History Month", "Faith Leader Appreciation Month", "Pregnancy and Infant Loss Awareness Month" and "Filipino American History Month". In addition, the Board has also proclaimed: October 5, as "Latina Equal Pay Day", October 9, as "Indigenous Peoples Day", October 10, as "National Black Brewers Day", October 13, as "Edward James Olmos Day", October 15, as "Pregnancy and Infant Loss Awareness Day of Remembrance", October 18, as "Domestic Violence Providers Appreciation Day", October 24, as "National Food Day" and October 25, as "Larry Itliong Day".

On the 3rd of October, Guillermo Viera Rosa was appointed to serve as the Chief Probation Officer for the Probation Department. Mr. Viera has over 27 years of experience working in the field of corrections and rehabilitation. He was hired in April 2023 to function as the Chief Strategist of Juvenile Operations for the County's Probation Department. Since May 2023, Mr. Viera has been serving as Interim Probation Chief.

I am pleased to announce the selection of two new Chief Deputy Directors for the Department of Public Social Services. I'm hoping they are both on the line to introduce themselves and say hello. You will get the opportunity to meet them in person soon at a future meeting.

Michael Sylvester assumed the position of Acting Chief Deputy of Administrative Services on September 6, 2022, and consistently provided guidance and leadership during his time in this role. His permanent appointment to the Chief Deputy of Administration will enable Michael to continue to use his over 16 years of DPSS experience at the senior management level to help lead our organization into the future. As many of you know, Michael is an innovative leader who has led many of the information technology initiatives that have transformed the way we work and how we deliver our programs and services to the communities we serve. During his time with DPSS, he's also gained invaluable experience as the Assistant Director in the Bureau of Special Operations. He will serve as the Chief Deputy of Administration.

Kristin Stranger has led the Bureau of Workforce Services South as an Assistant Director since December 21, 2020. Prior to joining DPSS, Kristin served as the Director of the Health and Human Services Agency (HHS) in Calaveras County, where she managed several agency divisions which included Adult Services, Children and Family Services (CalWORKs, Medi-Cal, CalFresh, Child Welfare, etc.), Mental Health, Public Health and Seniors and Disabled Services. In this role, and in her extensive work with CDSS, Kristin gained invaluable experience and a broad understanding of the interconnectedness between agencies serving the same client, as well as the importance of cross-collaboration to improve the lives of those served by our programs and services. She will serve as the Chief Deputy of Operations.

Mobilizing County Resources During the Federal Government Shutdown - On October 3, the Board directed the CEO to work with the Directors of DPSS, DPH, Aging and Disabilities and ISD, and the Chief Sustainability Officer, to develop and immediately implement a plan to address food insecurity, if a federal shutdown occurs. As you know, the funding for many of our programs comes from the federal government, and a shutdown was recently temporarily averted to November. Our Board, county departments, and community stakeholders are working together to provide a contingency plan to the Board in the event of a shutdown. Currently, the department is working to see how we can mitigate any shortfalls from the federal government by ensuring continuity of benefits issued across programs. What we know right now is that in the event of a shutdown, our CalWORKs programs will be sustained through December 2023 and CalFresh through November 2023.

California EBT Card Security and Technology Upgrade - The California EBT Project, in partnership with the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) and our EBT Vendor, Fidelity Information Services, Inc. (FIS), will be providing new tools to allow our cardholders self-service features that will assist in protecting the benefits on their EBT Card from fraudulent use. There are three major efforts occurring: deployment of new and upgraded tools for our cardholders, upgrades to the Interactive Voice Response (IVR), and upgraded features on the CA EBT Card that will use magnetic chip and tap pay features when using the card.

The first upgrade is coming in the 4th quarter of this year (Target Date: November 10, 2023) and will provide our cardholders with expanded access and features to protect the benefits on their CA EBT cards. CA will be deploying the FIS ebtEDGE Mobile Application and Web-enabled Cardholder portal. These tools will allow cardholders to access their card information and modify access using new features.

New features include Biometric Access – Touch ID, fingerprint or facial recognition on your mobile device. Freeze and Unfreeze Card – Turn “on”/ “off” you card, when you want, as often as you like. Block Transactions – Internet and out-of-state transactions, either temporarily or permanently. Card Replacement – A replacement card can be requested if card is lost or damaged and Change PIN – Ability to change your PIN when you want, and as often as you like, to keep it secure. More information will be coming to our partners and cardholders over the next few weeks via flyers, public links, press releases and social media campaigns. We will be sure to share that information with you all.

Establishing an Anti-Skimming Unit Board Motion - In addition, this past Tuesday, October 17, the Board also directed DPSS to work with the District Attorney, to fund and establish an Anti-Skimming Unit within the DA’s office, to investigate and prosecute those responsible for stealing public assistance benefits via skimming and other illegal methods of electronic theft.

Customer Service Center (CSC) Quarterly Update - As previously shared with you, the Department’s CSCs manage two operations: one is our General Inquiry Line, and the other is our Intake Line, that accepts applications for our four primary programs (Medi-Cal, CalFresh, CalWORKs and General Relief).

CSC (July 2023 – September 2023)

	July	August	September
Calls Received by EWs	418,296	405,385	415,068
Average Wait Time	40:35	22:46	36:20
Average Handle Time	15:13	14:50	15:04
*Forced Disconnects (Dropped Calls)	53,573	39,823	26,347

* All customers who reach the high call volume message are offered the option to go self-service or to enter into the CSC queue. If they do not make either of these selections, the call is disconnected and is counted as a forced disconnect. This additional entry point has a capacity of 500 lines.

Intake Call Centers Applications (July 2023 – September 2023)

	July	August	September
Applications Received (Overall)	126,454	145,572	134,840
Same Day Disposition Rate by Program (Overall)	56%	57%	57%
Applications Processed by CSC Intake / %	44,431 / 35%	46,928 / 32%	42,965 / 38%

DPSS’ Role with the Prevention Committee - On July 25, 2023, the Board of Supervisors passed a motion on Building Los Angeles County’s Prevention Infrastructure, creating the Prevention and Promotion Systems Governing Committee (Committee). The Committee is composed of eight (8) County department directors or initiative Executive Directors, representing County departments or Board priority initiatives, and one (1) County partnering organization or regional entity.

The inaugural Committee shall be comprised of the following County Departments and Initiative Directors: CEO; Public Social Services (DPSS); Public Health (DPH); Children and Family Services; Racial Equity (ARDI); CEO-Homeless Initiative; Chief Information Officer (CIO); Mental Health; and First 5 Los Angeles. The inaugural chairperson of the Committee shall be the Director of DPSS, which is the role I’ll be assuming.

The Committee’s initial key focus areas to anchor foundational prevention and promotion services infrastructure will be child welfare and family wellbeing; homelessness and housing; and behavioral health. These initial focus areas will act as a starting point for prevention and promotion work. The initial meeting of the Committee is scheduled for November 8, 2023. A link is provided in your document for you to read this motion in its entirety. A few of the key goals for the Committee include:

- Adopting the vision, model, and guiding principles, as determined by the Task Force.
 - Vision: To deliver an equitable, community-driven, and holistic prevention and promotion model to enable a safer, stronger, thriving, and more connected community.
 - Model: To include the following four concepts: Social Conditions, Equitable Decision-Making & Community Agency, Prevention, and Promotion.
- In partnership with the Anti-Racism, Diversity, and Inclusion (ARDI) Initiative and CEO-Legislative Affairs and Intergovernmental Relations, coordinate and consolidate a Countywide prevention and promotion annual policy agenda at federal, state, and local levels to advance prevention and promotion outcomes.

- In partnership with the ARDI Initiative, develop a robust community engagement and outreach plan that involves a diverse geographic representation of people with lived experience, service providers, clients and other stakeholders to advance prevention and promotion outcomes.

Follow up Item: Commissioner McBride asked if the name of the Prevention Committee could be more informational. A name describing the work of the Prevention Committee.

4.0 REVIEW AND APPROVE SEPTEMBER 21, 2023, MEETING MINUTES

The Chair called for a motion to approve the September 21, 2023 minutes. Commissioner Chan approved, and Commissioner Yam seconded the motion. The Chair called for the vote by roll call and the minutes were approved by unanimous vote as follows:

Adele Andrade-Stadler (Chair) - Aye	Summer McBride - Aye
Sue ElHessen, Ed.D. (Vice Chair) - Aye	Booker Pearson - Aye
Sam Joo - Aye	Dynasty Taylor - Aye
Mihran Kalaydjian - Aye	Andrew Yam - Aye
Pollyanna Lee - Aye	

5.0 CONTINUED BUSINESS

WORK PLAN GOAL 4: Evaluate CalFresh Program and Outreach Services to Reduce Food Scarcity and Improve Equity, Diversity, and Access

Presentation: CalFresh Program Overview – Part 2
Roobina Gerami, Human Services Administrator III
CalFresh Program Section

Ms. Gerami continued her update on the following topics:

As a continuation from last month's presentation, I want to discuss retention. The main two reasons CalFresh benefits are discontinued are due to non-compliance with Semi-Annual Report (SAR 7) and Renewal (RE). On average 15,833 (or 1.7%) SAR 7 cases and 11,500 (or 1.2%) renewal cases are discontinued monthly. The department has implemented text and robocall campaigns to remind the HHs their report is due, incomplete, or not received, and the methods of submitting it. There is no longer a requirement to submit a paper application for RE. RE Line and Interview Waiver were implemented to simplify the renewal process. The Work Number process and Telephonic Signature functionality are also available to staff to use at RE and SAR 7 to alleviate the need for a signature or income verification requirement. Both reports and verifications can be submitted through BenefitsCal. CSC staff can assist HHs to complete their SAR 7.

Upcoming Changes

California Food Assistance Program (CFAP) Eligibility Expansion will extend eligibility to individuals who are 55 years and older who do not have documented immigration status. This policy is targeted to be implemented as of October 1, 2025.

Pre-populated Semi-Annual Report (SAR 7) will be implemented to make customer reporting easier. This implementation is projected to launch in November 2024.

Enhancements

Customer Service Center (CSC) Expansion-DPSS has expanded from three CSCs to eight total CSCs. There are three CSCs to handle general inquiries and five other CSCs dedicated to take applications over the phone by using Telephonic Signature functionality. This departmental enhancement has reduced the need for a district office visit and has made it easier to apply for benefits.

Flexible Interviewing, Telephonic Signature, and The Work Number enhance customer experience and expedite processing. Flexible interviewing allows customers to contact DPSS Intake Call Centers and Renewal (RE) Line for intake or RE interviews and apply by phone without submitting a paper or online application. Telephonic Signature has eliminated the need for a wet signature on applications and most forms. Lastly, The Work Number assists customers with fulfilling their income verification requirements.

BenefitsCal Website is an enhanced state-wide system designed for a more user-friendly experience where customers can easily apply online for most programs offered by the department, submit their renewal applications, SAR 7 reports, upload mandatory verifications, review case status, and download verification of benefits document.

CalFresh Chat Bot is a messaging system implemented for the CalFresh Program to provide Customer Service Centers (CSC) Intake Eligibility Staff with responses to policy questions needed to process applications in real time. This effort is intended to help intake staff process and determine accurate CalFresh benefit issuances efficiently and consistently.

Dual Enrollment Medi-Cal only applicants/participants who are potentially eligible for CalFresh are now offered the opportunity to apply for CalFresh benefits, which is intended to increase the participation in the CalFresh program overall.

Market Match & Incentive Food Programs

Traditional Market Match (led by the Ecology Center) is California's healthy food incentive program that matches customers' CalFresh benefits at participating farmers' markets and other farm-direct sites. When CalFresh customers use their Electronic Benefit Transaction (EBT) cards to purchase at participating farmers' markets, they may receive credit (up to \$15 per visit).

New Market Match led in partnership with L.A. County Department of Public Health (DPH) & Sustainable Economic Enterprises of Los Angeles (SEE-LA) allows farmers' markets participating in the Traditional Market Match program to provide an increased amount of matching through American Rescue Plan (ARP) funding. CalFresh customers can now use their EBT at participating farmers' markets and stores, to receive up to \$20 credit per visit.

Fruit and Vegetable Pilot Program (led by the California Department of Social Services (CDSS)) provides a dollar-for-dollar match (up to \$60 per month) to CalFresh customers who use their EBT card to purchase California-grown fruits and vegetables at participating retailers and farmers' markets. The incentive is added to the customers EBT card and can be used to purchase any food item (not just fruits and vegetables).

Presentation: Work Requirements and Update on ABAWDS
Shawn Amiel, Human Services Administrator III
START Program Section

Ms. Amiel provided an update on the following topics:

All CalFresh participants are subject to Work Registration unless an exemption is met. CalFresh work registration requirements applies to people ages 16-59; working under 30 hours per week; and not qualified for a work registration exemption.

Work Registration Exemptions

A CalFresh participant may be exempt from work registration requirements if they are under 16 years of age or over 59; physically or mentally unfit for employment; complying with CalWORKs Welfare-to-Work (GAIN); responsible for a dependent child under age six or caring for an incapacitated person; receiving Unemployment Insurance Benefits or who has applied for, but has not yet begun to receive unemployment compensation; participating in a substance abuse or alcoholic rehabilitation program; employed or self-employed and working at least 30 hours per week or has earnings equal to federal minimum wage for 30 hours a week; and enrolled at least half-time in any recognized school, higher education institution, or training program.

Able-Bodied Adults Without Disabilities (ABAWD)

CalFresh participants who are subject to work requirements are identified as Able-Bodied Adults Without Dependents (ABAWDs), if they are ages 18-52; not responsible for dependents; or not eligible for exemptions. The ABAWD age limits changed due to the Fiscal Responsibilities Act (FRA) of 2023. The FRA will have the age limit change again in 2024.

ABAWD Time Limits and Exemptions

ABAWDs are subject to time limits. Within a 36-month period, they can receive three full months of CalFresh benefits before needing to meet work requirements to continue receiving CalFresh. Some CalFresh individuals who are exempt from time limits include under 18 and over 52 years of age; residing in a CalFresh household with a member under 18; medically certified as mentally or physically unfit to work; participating in the Office of Refugee Resettlement Training Program; exempt from work registration; pregnant; veteran; foster youth 24 years of age or younger; and experiencing homelessness.

Meeting ABAWD Work Requirements

ABAWDs are required to work or participate in a qualifying work activity for at least 20 hours per week or 80 hours per month. To meet CalFresh ABAWD work requirements, an individual must provide verification of employment; do community service or complete volunteer work by completing workfare; participating in a CalFresh Employment and Training (CFET) Program; and/or doing a combination of any of the above.

One of the things I wanted to really highlight is that California, especially Los Angeles County, has been operating under an ABAWD Waiver since 2000. The waiver kept getting renewed and we were supposed to implement work requirements in 2020. The state applies for the waivers on the federal level on our behalf. They partner up around early spring with a think tank in Washington, D.C. They look at the unemployment rate and other factors to make their determination. ABAWD Work requirements are currently not being enforced due to a state waiver, however, this time our waiver is due to expire on October 31, 2024, provided there are no further waivers granted.

We are still preparing for the implementation of ABAWDs Work Requirement when it does come around. Of course, we will be communicating to our customers in advance to let them know about it. Even though people are subject to the work requirements, if they are an ABAWD, they do not have to comply with the ABAWD time limit requirement, since it does not apply.

Follow up Item: Commissioner Yam and Mc Bride encouraged the department to utilize CBOs, non-profits, and faith-based partners to help facilitate this conversation to the community they serve, if the waiver is imposed. The messaging is important. Can leaders of the community be trained and given this information so they can be the point of contact, with a handy cheat sheet that will let you know if they qualify to use more of the services that are already existing.

Ms. Amiel stated that is something that could be explore. When we are ready to do a communications campaign, we must make sure we are communicating with every single outlet, CBOs, and faith-based organizations, to get the word out because there is going to be, in my opinion, some confusion as to whether the requirements apply to them. We don't want to cause concern when we really don't know yet if this is happening. We have received some inquiries already asking what ABAWDS and we have given information to them. We do recognize the need to make sure that the information is out there as much as possible in a timely manner. The State of California, Department of Social Services will be doing their own promotions as well.

6.0 CHAIR'S REPORT

Ms. Toliver provided an update to the Commission regarding the Holiday Gala. She will confirm the venue and send confirmation to commissioners.

7.0 ADJOURNMENT

Meeting was adjourned at 12:00 p.m.