

# Budget Hearings Board Inquiry Form

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Inquiry Number: 16

Department: DSS  
Date: 6/9/14  
Page(s) of Budget Book/PowerPoint:

**Request/Question:** CWS caseload per caseworker, compare to benchmark Counties and what adding 1 more would do to caseload per worker

Response Prepared by: Daniel Nielson

**Response:** See attached report



*County of Santa Barbara*  
**DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES**

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**Daniel Nielson**  
**Director**

To: Board of Supervisors  
 From: Daniel Nielson, Director   
 Date: June 9, 2014  
 Re: Social Worker Caseload in Child Welfare

C: Mona Miyasato, CEO  
 Terri Maus-Nisich, ACEO

Honorable Supervisors,

At this morning's Budget hearing I was asked questions about Social Worker caseload size in the Child Welfare program. This memo and attachments attempt to address those questions.

As I indicated to you in my memo to your Board on June 2, 2014 –the Social Work staff in the area of Child Welfare has increased by approximately 20% since 2012, inclusive of Social Services Case Aides, Social Services Supervisors, Social Workers and Social Services Practitioners. This includes the addition of 11 Social Services Practitioners and two Social Services Supervisors. We propose to add four positions in Child Welfare in FY 14-15 as part of our expansion request (1 Supervisor, 2 Social Workers and 1 Social Services Practitioner).

Due to the fact that every county assigns work in a different manner (e.g. work assigned to a lower level Social Worker in one county might be assigned to a Case Aide in a different county; work done by a higher level Social Worker in one county might be done by a Supervisor or Analyst in another county) it is impossible to do a cross-county comparison of workers and workload in Child Welfare beyond what we have achieved in the attached chart.

The attached chart indicates where we stand in comparison to some of our comparator counties and Ventura. It gives you a sense of workload versus caseload but is not the definitive assessment given the multiple ways work is assigned to Social Workers and other staff in various counties, as previously mentioned.

I also want to attempt to address the question I thought I heard about what the ideal size workforce is related to caseload in Child Welfare – and how many staff I would like to have in an ideal world.

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**Maria Gardner, M.A.**  
**Deputy Director**  
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**Deputy Director**  
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Child Welfare Directors or Social Services Directors have historically tried to afford as many staff as we can in Child Welfare as we know that the more time Social Workers can spend assessing, guiding and responding to families and children the better outcomes those families will achieve. We work to make sure our resources are used to maximum efficiency and effectiveness.

The 2030 Study completed in the year 2000 (the first few pages are attached) in response to SB 2030 quantified recommended standards for best practice but the state never funded Child Welfare to achieve those suggested case standards. **With the passage of 14 years and many changes in practice I do not believe the study is still relevant, though I do believe the underlying proposition that a reduction in caseload size will result in better outcomes.** At the present time our staff carry approximately 6-7 cases/referrals more than the Minimum Recommended Standard of the 2030 Study in each of the program areas. To reach the Minimum Recommended Caseload of the 2030 Study we would need an additional 20-25 Social Workers.

### CWS Workload vs Social Worker FTE Comparison of Counties

County	Total Open Cases May 2014	Total Referrals Received May 2014	Total Workload	Total CWS Social Worker FTE	Average Workload Per Social Worker FTE
Santa Barbara	696	485	1181	68.5	17
San Luis Obispo	469	359	828	49	17
Santa Cruz	361	281	642	51	12.5
Solano	610	313	923	73	12.5
Sonoma	908	174	1082	86.5	12.5
Placer	515	313	828	34	24
Ventura	1324	838	2162	130	16.5

# **SB 2030 CHILD WELFARE SERVICES WORKLOAD STUDY**

## **FINAL REPORT**

**APRIL 2000**

### **PROJECT TEAM**

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## **Executive Summary**

### ***Introduction and Background***

The resources required by county Child Welfare Services (CWS) to provide services to abused and neglected children in California are considerable. Each month caseworkers investigate some 40 thousand reports of maltreatment. Roughly 60 thousand family members receive services designed to improve the capacity of families to safely care for their children. Of over 100 thousand children in foster care, California is responsible for almost 75 thousand children who are in a long-term permanent placement. In addition to these basic services, caseworkers and other staff provide a range of services needed to prevent the need for more intensive care and to work with others at the community level and between counties to insure that the needs of children and families are met.

California's current method for allocating basic Child Welfare Services (CWS) resources is based on caseload standards and average monthly case counts. This leads to estimates of the number of workers or Full Time Equivalent (FTE) required to provide the basic Child Welfare Services. The method provides both the total budget of the basic program statewide and the allocation of this budget across counties which are responsible for administering the program. In the 15 years since the current model was adopted, there have been extensive changes in the delivery of social services as a result of numerous legislative, demographic, programmatic, administrative, and/or technical changes affecting the practice of CWS that necessitate a review of this process. Passage of Senate Bill (SB) 2030 required that the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) undertake an evaluation of workload and budgeting methodologies and set forth certain requirements for such a study. This report summarizes the recommendations emerging from the evaluation that was conducted from June 15, 1999, through December 15, 1999.

The four goals pertaining to the scope of the SB 2030 evaluation are stated below in order of priority:

1. To understand the routine activities of child welfare staff<sup>1</sup> in fulfilling their duties;
2. To understand the time needed to complete all mandated practice activities; and

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<sup>1</sup> Clerical and administrative functions were not a focus of the study results and recommendations per se, but are addressed by the recommended budgetary approach.

3. To estimate the time required to engage in child welfare practice that can be considered best practice or state-of-the-art (as referenced in the SB 2030 legislation) (California Department of Human Services, RFP 99-03, p.4).
4. Review of the budgetary methodology for statewide Child Welfare Services and for county-level allocations.

The legislation also established the statewide advisory group consisting of caseworkers, administrators and other stakeholders. Broad representation from within CDSS and the county agencies was mandated. The role of the advisory group was to help refine expectations, review proposals and help select the contractor, provide guidance and assistance to the SB 2030 Project Team, and review the study results and recommendations in this report.

To address these goals a workload measurement and analysis process was conducted. All 58 counties participated with over 13,000 staff supplying workload study data for a 2-week period. Other study recommendations and results derive from reviews of laws and policies. Other qualitative data were gathered through focus groups held throughout the state and with participation of staff from most counties. This summary provides a description of the study recommendations and results of the evaluation. For a more detailed discussion of these recommendations, please refer to the recommendations section of the full report.

### ***Study Recommendations***

#### **Recommended Standards from the Core Workload Study and Focus Groups**

The average time per month it takes to provide service to a case is critical to the resource allocation budget model used by CDSS to set the annual budget request and to allocate funds to the counties. The table below shows the current Proposed County Administrative Budget (PCAB) caseload standards and the recommended changes to these standards for the five basic CWS program areas. The first number in each cell of the table is the average hours per month per case, the second number found in parentheses, is the cases of that type that one worker can carry. The current workload standard column provides the values that have been used since 1984 for budget allocations. Measured workload time is derived from the workload study which captured work for 13,584 eligible CWS case-carrying staff at the county level who performed 1,140,667.6 hours of work during the study. The difference between current standards and measured work reflects the efforts that workers are utilizing compared to the theoretical time that

was allocated by the PCAB method. There are many explanations for this difference including the possibility that some cases are not served each month, the use of overtime, and differences in how the counties have implemented the CWS basic program. Minimum and optimum times reflect the results from the review of laws, policies, standard-setting focus groups, and outcome expectations. Caseloads are calculated based on the study finding that 116.10 hours per month, on average, are available for workers to provide direct services to cases. The main project report contains a more detailed discussion of the study methods and the workload study results.

**Comparison of CWS Time per Case Standards  
Hours per Case per Month and Cases per Worker**

<b>CWS Basic Program Area</b>	<b>Current Workload Standard</b>	<b>Measured Workload Time*</b>	<b>Composite Minimum Recommended Standard Time</b>	<b>Composite Optimum Recommended Standard Time</b>
Screening/Hotline/Intake (ERA) Caseload per Worker	0.36 (322.50)	0.78 (148.85)	1.00 (116.10)	1.69 (68.70)
Emergency Response (ER) Caseload per Worker	7.35 (15.80)	7.19 (16.15)	8.91 (13.03)	11.75 (9.88)
Family Maintenance (FM) Caseload per Worker	3.32 (34.97)	3.97 (29.24)	8.19 (14.18)	11.44 (10.15)
Family Reunification (FR) Caseload per Worker	4.30 (27.00)	4.97 (23.36)	7.45 (15.58)	9.72 (11.94)
Permanent Placement (PP) Caseload per Worker	2.15 (54.00)	2.37 (48.99)	4.90 (23.69)	7.07 (16.42)

\* "Measured Workload Time" based on a 1-month calculation. Except for Screening/Hotline/ Intake (ERA), which represents a 2-week time value.