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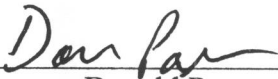
Report
Of the 2011-2012
Sutter County Grand Jury

SUPERIOR COURT OF CALIFORNIA
COUNTY OF SUTTER
CLERK OF THE COURT
By JACKIE LARWELL Deputy

Donald Pope-Foreperson, Jeffry Barrow, Harold Beeso, Thomas Bethards, Bonnie Briscoe
Christine Duncan, Donald Hanson, Wendy Iverson, April James, Lanier Stenhouse
Karen La Rose, Henry Lamon, Martha McClard, Linda Peterson
Brandy Roberts, Mark Jenny, Terrance Sutton, Harprit Takher

Final Report (pursuant to Penal Code 933 (a)) on subject:

Sutter County Department of Child Support Services




Donald Pope
2011-2012 Foreperson

APRIL 3, 2012

Date

Pursuant to Penal Code Section 933 (a), the Presiding Judge makes the findings that the
foregoing report is in compliance with the Title 4, Chapter 3 of the Penal Code
("Powers and Duties of the Grand Jury")



Honorable Christopher Chandler, Presiding Judge
Superior Court of California, County of Sutter County

4.3.12

Date

Sutter County Department of Child Support Services

Summary

During late June of 2011, the Grand Jury received a letter from a Sutter County citizen, who is not and has never been an employee of Child Support Services (CSS), who was concerned by the seemingly disorganized conditions and low morale within that department. An investigation was initiated by the Grand Jury to determine if the conditions stated in the letter were factual and did they adversely affect the citizens of Sutter County who depend upon the services of CSS.

Subsequent to a six week investigation, the Grand Jury concluded low morale and disorganization described in the letter has been resolved; however, the Grand Jury is concerned with communication between management and employees.

Background

Function of CSS

CSS was established in 1975 and charged with the responsibility of assisting the guardian/custodial parent to collect financial support for their offspring from the separated member of the family group to ensure that financial support is provided for their minor children. When the separated parents do not agree on the amount of financial support, CSS will assist the guardian/custodial parent to acquire a court order to determine the amount of support.

To initiate a case, the guardian/custodial parent can directly contact CSS to request their assistance or they can be referred by the Department of Welfare. Parties who agree on child support, and pay as per their agreement, do not require CSS intervention. Only those who need assistance collecting financial support are assisted by CSS.

Once a case is opened CSS does the following:

- Establish paternity
- Seek a court order to establish financial support
- Determine the location of the absent parent
- Start collections voluntarily or through legal process
- Continue monitoring case for compliance

When financial support is established by a court order and the non-custodial parent begins to pay child support, all support money is sent to the State Disbursements Unit (SDU) in Sacramento, California, where it is held and distributed. If the non-custodial parent is not found or is not able to pay child support there is no disbursement from SDU. However, the guardian/custodial parent may continue drawing benefits from the Department of Welfare.

Internal Departmental Changes

Dissatisfaction among the staff began with the retirement of the previous Director and the hiring of a new Director. Shortly after this time a new statewide automated computer system, which

Sutter County was one of three pilot counties, was implemented. During this time staff had to maintain the manual system while learning the automated system. These changes created confusion and stress which led to low morale throughout CSS.

Approach

The 2011-2012 Sutter County Grand Jury Criminal Justice Committee conducted an on-site visit of CSS at 543 Garden Highway, Suite A, Yuba City, with the Director on Friday, September 30, 2011. In addition, the Grand Jury interviewed numerous members of CSS including the management team consisting of the Director, Deputy Director, the Support Services Manager, and several staff members.

Discussion

On June 1, 2009, the current Director of CSS was hired. Up to this time case records were being compiled and maintained manually. Morale was not an issue. The new Director was instrumental in convincing California Department of Child Support Services (CDCSS) to include Sutter County as one of three counties to pilot a new automated computerized system that would be used statewide. The manual system and the automated computerized system were used in parallel until early 2011 when the automated computerized system was fully implemented.

During the two years of transition from the manual system to the automated computerized system CSS employees labored through numerous changes. Occasionally, the changes were hour-by-hour and/or day-to-day. In addition to these frequent changes, staff was expected to provide a consistent level of service to clients while learning new procedures. The on-the-job stress generated led to serious frustration that resulted in extremely low morale within the department. This was the condition at the beginning of 2011, at which time seven long term employees retired leaving a brief deficiency in the experience level of the department. To off-set the loss of experience, several promotions were made and four new employees were hired, one of which was terminated. The atmosphere within CSS began to stabilize as the new system was learned and new habits formed which facilitated the maintenance of assigned cases. This resulted in improved morale.

Findings

Based on information gleaned from the interviews it was determined:

- Morale has improved
- Communications between employees and management is cordial
- Employees are familiar with the automated computerized system and are generally satisfied with the training and support they receive from Supervisors, Leads, and Attorneys
- Customer Service is a priority
- Management and employees have undergone a long period of growth and adjustment that has resulted in a more stable work environment

Recommendations

It is recommended that Management and Supervision continue to improve communications to support Case Managers to offset the high stress nature of this work environment.

Respondents

Director, Child Support Services, Jamie Murray
Chairman, Sutter County Board of Supervisors
