



Connie Beck, Director
Social Services | Public Health | Behavioral Health

news release

May 27, 2021

County signs stipulated judgment with State Attorney General

The California Attorney General (AG) and the Humboldt County Department of Health & Human Services (DHHS) jointly submitted a request Thursday to the Humboldt County Superior Court to enter into a proposed stipulated supplemental judgment that intends to fully resolve all outstanding compliance issues relating to the prior 2018 stipulated judgment over DHHS's Child Welfare Services Division (CWS).

The stipulated settlement acknowledges the work that CWS has accomplished since 2018 and extends the AG settlement for an additional year to finish the tasks that still need to be completed.

The 2018 stipulated judgment followed an investigation into specific policies and practices related to CWS after concerns were raised in 2015 by local tribes and other community partners regarding inefficiencies and barriers to service primarily in CWS's Emergency Response function.

The requirements set forth in the 2018 stipulated judgment reflected collaborative efforts on the part of the AG, DHHS and the Humboldt County Sheriff's Office (HCSO) to improve outcomes for children and families in the county's child welfare system of care.

California Attorney General Rob Bonta said, "This collaborative agreement with our partners in Humboldt County is a critical step forward to help protect all of our children. It provides for continued monitoring and will help ensure that these systemic improvements will be sustained into the future with the partnership of tribal governments and other members of the community. We look forward to continuing to work together in the days ahead."

CWS Division Director Amanda Winstead said while the majority of requirements were met in the three years, "We are committed to continuing to work closely with tribes and partners and to serving children and families in Humboldt County."

Since the 2018 stipulated judgment, CWS:

- Entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between CWS and the HCSO and revised CWS's Policies and Practices (P&Ps) to ensure cross-reporting of allegations of child abuse and neglect and to coordinate joint investigations
- Participated in the Child Abuse Services Team (CAST) Advisory Board and Protocol Subcommittee and assisted in finalizing the CAST protocol
- Entered into an interagency MOU with DHHS Behavioral Health to coordinate mental health referrals and assessments
- Revised CWS's P&Ps to address and ensure the inclusion of tribal input and collaboration, to provide for additional supervisory oversight and to set forth specific expectations for the administration of CWS
- Implemented an automated call tree at the hotline which connects callers directly to social workers 24/7, as well as an electronic cross-reporting system
- Developed and implemented training programs to provide ongoing support to staff
- Developed an online Child Protection Reporting Guide
- Engaged and contracted with a tribal consultant to assist with tribal collaboration and the development of protocols with the local tribes, with the first protocol entered into in February 2019 with the Hoopa Valley Tribe
- Created an Ombuds Office to investigate complaints
- Prepared and held Community Task Force meetings to engage community stakeholders and provide transparency
- Created a Continuous Quality Improvement Program to assess and improve CWS's operations on an ongoing basis
- Created a specific program within CWS to address issues relating to tribal families and compliance with the Indian Child Welfare Act
- Implemented social worker partnering to enhance the ability to provide continuity of services to families and to address backlog issues
- Improved investigation completion timeliness.

DHHS Director Connie Beck said the settlement has moved CWS to make system improvements and work more closely with tribes, the Sheriff's Office, other law enforcement and community partners. "I am continuously impressed with the work our staff and partners do and am so grateful for their continued diligence and dedication to the children and families in our community."

-###-

Follow us on Twitter: [@HumCoDHHS](https://twitter.com/HumCoDHHS) and
Facebook: facebook.com/humcodhhs