

Necessary Reform in the Child Welfare System

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What is the Child Welfare System?

The Child Welfare System in the United States is a government organization that is supposed to help children when they are in unsafe living environments. Often, the support that these children need does not come early enough or is not enough. The National Child Welfare System needs reform but one county in particular, Los Angeles County, California, would benefit from reform.

Facts:

- LA DCFS is the largest in the country
 - Approximately 30,000 kids
 - Approximately 4,000 square miles
- 72% of Social Workers do not complete the proper checks that they are supposed to complete (in LA County)
- Ratio of social workers to supervisors 5:1
 - Each supervisor must check each of their social worker's cases which can be around 150 children
 - Each social worker can have around 25 cases, but the optimal number is around 15
- "Thriving Families, Safer Children" Program implemented but too early to see any results
 - National program designed to help reform the entire system-starts off in small areas then eventually expands
- Invest LA Program
 - Strives to improve child safety, healthy families and supportive communities
- As shown in figure 1, the number of fatalities has decreased slightly since 2015 but around 150 children are dying annually, many of which have an open case with DCFS
- Figure 2 shows that approximately 35,000 children are receiving welfare in LA County alone

Why is reform necessary?

Reform is needed because children are being left in unsafe living environments for extended periods of time. In some cases, children have died or have been severely injured. This is due to lack of resources, and ineffective assistance.

Possible reform options:

- Hire more Social Workers (approximately 3,500 new have been hired between 2013 and 2020) and more supervisors
 - less cases per worker; easier to do proper checks/evaluations; keeps children safe
- Increase resources
 - Funding: access to more money would provide better resources to protect children from dangerous situations

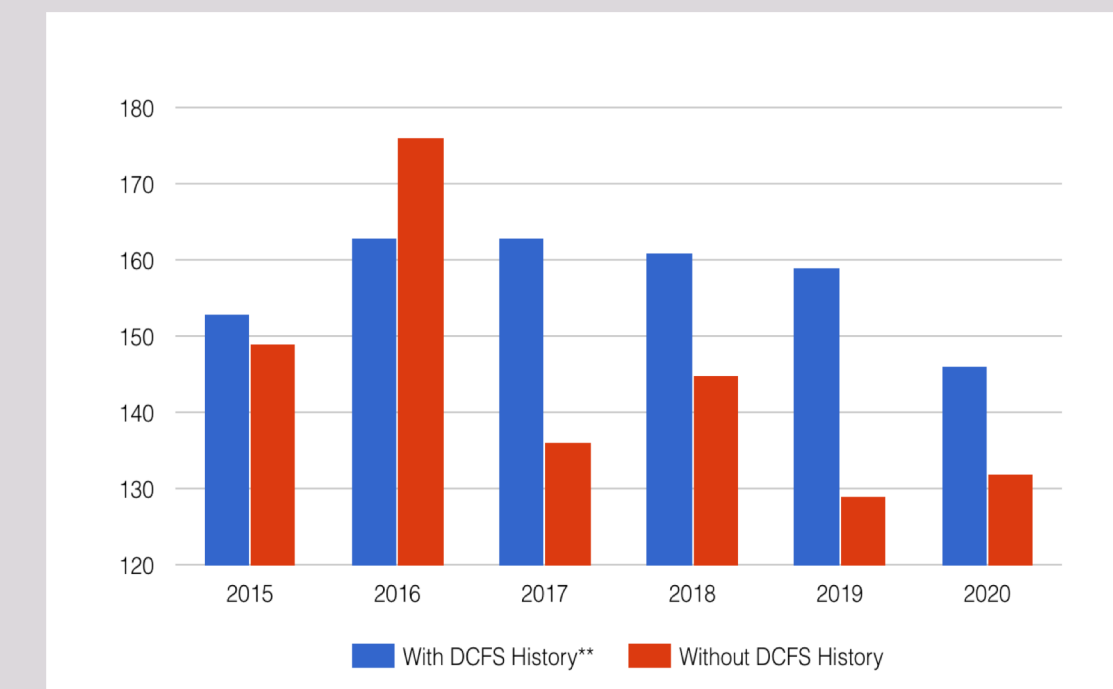
Figure 1:

Graph depicting the number of child fatalities that have occurred annually since 2015. Includes numbers for children with and without a DCFS history. The numbers do not include children who had open DCFS cases in other counties. A child would have a DCFS history if they or their siblings were referred, if the referral happened close to their death and if the referenced actions referral had nothing to do their death.

Figure 2:

Shows the numbers of children that are currently receiving welfare as of March 2021

Figure 1: Total Fatalities Reported to the Los Angeles County Child Protection Hotline (CPH) With and Without Previous DCFS History



Source: <https://dcfs.lacounty.gov/resources/child-fatality-data/>

Figure 2: In-Home and Out-of-Home Services Caseload (Children) as of March 2021

	FM and FR Services Caseload	* Adoption Services Caseload
Emergency Response (Open Services Cases)	755	4
Family Maintenance	Under 12 Months	8,954
	Over 12 Months	2,947
	Sub Total	11,901
Family Reunification	Under 18 Months	7,663
	Over 18 Months	2,067
	Sub Total	9,730
Permanent Placement	10,301	6,484
Supportive Transition	2,683	15
Total Children Receiving Child Welfare	35,370	8,477

* Adoption services caseload represents children in in-home and out-of-home services caseload receiving adoption services.

Source: <https://dcfs.lacounty.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Monthly-FactSheet-March2021.pdf>

Conclusion:

- Some changes have been made in individual offices or small areas in the county but there needs to be widespread change at the county, state and national levels
- These changes will keep children safe and ensure that children are in environments that are not a detriment to them
- They will reduce the number of children that are negatively impacted by bureaucratic issues like lack of oversight or employees