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California State Senate

SENATOR AISHA WAHAB, MBA

TENTH SENATE DISTRICT

ASSISTANT MAJORITY LEADER
CHAIR, PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE
CHAIR, BUDGET SUBCOMMITTEE NO. 5

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APPROPRIATIONS
BUDGET
HOUSING
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LOCAL GOVERNMENT



April 24, 2024

The Honorable Gregg Hart
Chair, Joint Legislative Audit Committee
1020 N Street, Room 107
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: State Audit Request of Department of Children and Family Services within Alameda County's Social Services Agency

Dear Chair Hart and Members of the Committee:

I respectfully request that the Joint Legislative Audit Committee approve an audit of the Department of Children and Family Services within Alameda County's Social Services Agency.

In 2021, Tonisha Smith filed a complaint against Alameda County and its Social Service Agency on behalf of a youth in extended foster care who experienced more than two weeks of homelessness because the agency failed to provide her with a place to live.

In June 2023, the City of Hayward filed a lawsuit against Alameda County for failing to protect foster children at a transitional center where foster youth were "frequently go missing and are knowingly being exposed to and/or coerced into drug use, assaults and other forms of violence, sex trafficking and prostitution."

AB 2083 (Chapter 815, Statutes of 2018) requires each county to develop and implement a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) outlining the roles and responsibilities of the various local entities that serve children and youth in foster care who have experienced severe trauma. The legislation focuses on the child welfare system, but requires partnership to serve children and youth across various other local systems, including behavioral health, education and developmental services.

I am requesting this audit due to years of issues within the Department of Children and Family Services within Alameda County's Social Services Agency, especially concerning foster youth.

There are clear systemic failures and a lack of administrative planning to support foster youth with emerging and complex needs. This is particularly evident with regards to the short term shelter population, as cited above.

Below are questions we request the state auditor to consider:

- 1) Please evaluate the county's **process for cross collaboration**, as required by AB 2083 (Chapter 815, Statutes of 2018) including adherence to the required local MOU process for addressing youth with complex needs.
 - a) Determine whether the timeline, process and partners outlined in the MOU are sufficient to provide needed support for identified youth.
 - b) Evaluate the county's use of family finding and engagement, as well as intensive family finding efforts for older youth or those in the system longer than 2 years.
 - c) Evaluate whether foster youth to have timely access to behavioral health services throughout the continuum of mental health needs.
 - d) Evaluate whether collaboration is sufficient to ensure children who are involved in both the child welfare and regional center systems receive timely needed services.

- 2) Evaluate the department's approach to ensuring the health and safety of foster youth placed in **transitional centers**. Specifically, evaluate:
 - a) The safety measures put in place and whether such procedures are consistently followed.
 - b) How the department evaluates the overall performance of transitional centers and ensures corrective action when warranted.

- 3) Determine whether the department has a **sufficient number of trained staff** to address its foster child caseload and complaint investigation workload by performing the following:
 - a) Determine the trends and total number of department positions who review foster child placements and investigate child abuse claims (both filled and vacant positions) and evaluate how staffing levels compare to employee caseload standards and best practices.
 - b) Determine whether the department has a training program to ensure employees are aware of departmental case processing standards and best practices. Identify how many employees have received training and how often such training occurs.

Review and assess any other issues that are significant to the audit and whether, given the resources, funding was expended in alignment with stated goals and objectives, provide a list of recommendations and legislative solutions.

Thank you for your consideration. For any questions relating to this request, please contact me directly or my Communications Director Alicia Lawrence at (916) 651-4410.

Sincerely,



Aisha Wahab
California State Senate, 10th District



Liz Ortega
California State Assembly, District 20