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LITTLE SHEEP

# We can prevent child abuse

Spending money up-front is better for families—and for taxpayers

**Child abuse costs Sacramento County more than \$700 million a year—enough to send 76,000 kids to preschool.**

This is not a small issue. In Sacramento County in 2018, there were 21,406 child abuse victims reported, one child every 25 minutes. Child abuse is linked to significantly higher risks of poor physical and mental health, suicide, economic hardship, substance abuse and incarceration.

Unfortunately, about 95% of the public child welfare money allocated for child abuse can only be used after the child has been physically, emotionally, or sexually abused. Only 5% is available to prevent the harm. That is how our systems are structured and funded.

In October 2014, Sacramento County Child Protective Services took advantage of an opportunity to use a federal waiver that would allow funding for prevention services. Child Protective Services allocated \$2.5 million to our local Birth & Beyond Family Resource Centers to provide services including home visitation, domestic violence counseling and crisis intervention and evidence-based parenting classes. CPS directed another \$400,000 to a community agency that provides substance use treatment and recovery services.

CPS also added more social workers to the front end of the system, providing intensive services to strengthen families and keeping children and families together when safe to do so. CPS also added social worker positions to increase the number of foster children that reunite with their parents, get adopted or obtain legal guardianship. Since making these investments, more children have remained safely with their families, with a 30% reduction in monthly entries into CPS, a 31% reduction in the number of children in foster care and an 110% improvement in foster youth achieving legal permanency after being in care for more than two years.

This federal waiver was scheduled to end on Sept. 30, which would have eliminated the option of funding prevention services. However, key



Sheila Boxley, left, is president & CEO of the Child Abuse Prevention Center and Michelle Callejas is director of Sacramento County's child, family and adult services department.

county staff and other counties and states with waivers successfully negotiated a compromise that is now awaiting congressional approval.

But with the compromise, the funding has been reduced and will be fully eliminated in September 2021. At the same time, First 5, which funds programs for families with children through 5 years old and is a major funder for Birth & Beyond, is experiencing reductions from its revenue source, a tax on tobacco products.

Meanwhile, a team of decision-makers from a variety of public and private organizations have committed to developing a Sacramento County Child Abuse Prevention Plan. The initial plan will be fully vetted in the community among residents and providers and is expected to be released in the spring of 2020. It is a call to action.

We know how to prevent child abuse. We have connections to the community through Family Resource Centers, the Black Child Legacy Campaign's community incubator sites and other service providers. We have the will of the county and nonprofit agencies to come together to plan for prevention. We also have compelling economic information about the cost of child abuse, strong evaluations and a clear need for prevention services that promote child safety and strengthen families. □