



JUDICIAL COUNCIL OF  
CALIFORNIA  
ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE  
OF THE COURTS  
Public Information Office  
455 Golden Gate Avenue  
San Francisco, CA 94102-3688  
[www.courtinfo.ca.gov](http://www.courtinfo.ca.gov)

415-865-7740

Lynn Holton  
Public Information Officer

# NEWS RELEASE

Release Number: 25

Release Date: May 12, 2009

Contact: Lynn Holton (415) 865-7726/7740  
Renee Wessels (916) 565-3882

## **Sweeping Changes Underway to California's Foster Care System**

*California Blue Ribbon Commission on Children in Foster Care  
Releases Final Report and Action Plan;  
Cites Urgent Need for Action in "Changing the Way Courts Do  
Business" and Calls for Implementation of Key Reforms*

Sacramento, May 12—With the release today of its final report on recommendations and an action plan to improve this state's juvenile dependency court and child welfare system, the California Blue Ribbon Commission on Children in Foster Care called for the immediate implementation of key reforms, including pending legislation that will extend supports to foster youth until age 21.

The commission also announced early progress in its unprecedented three-year collaborative effort to help overstressed juvenile dependency courts do a better job of safeguarding children and reduce the need for foster care.

Appointed by Chief Justice Ronald M. George in 2006, the commission has concluded its review of the courts' role in foster care. After identifying a court and child welfare system that is plagued by staggering caseloads, insufficient and rushed hearings, lack of adequate information for judges to make informed decisions, and other barriers that prevent foster youth and their families from having an opportunity to participate meaningfully in proceedings that affect their lives, including where and with whom children will live, the commission made recommendations for sweeping reform and adopted an action plan to implement those recommendations.

The commission's 79 recommendations fall into four broad categories: 1) reasonable efforts to prevent removal and achieve permanency; 2) court reform; 3) collaboration among courts and partnering agencies; and 4) resources and funding. For its initial action plan, the commission focused on a range of "fiscally responsible and realistically achievable" recommendations

(over)

representing all four categories.

Recommendations focus on both preventing the need for foster care as well as improving the system itself. Key recommendations include:

- **Kinship**—That child welfare agencies engage family members earlier and the Judicial Council work with state and federal leaders to develop greater flexibility in approving relative placements when necessary.
- **Extending support for transitioning youth**—That pending state legislation to extend support to foster youth until age 21 be enacted without delay.
- **Caseloads**—That the Judicial Council advocate reasonable judicial, attorney, and social worker caseloads.
- **Ensuring a meaningful voice in court**—That all participants in dependency proceedings, including children and parents, have an opportunity to be present at and heard in court.
- **Prioritizing foster care**—That all agencies and the courts prioritize children in foster care and their families when providing services and when allocating and administering public and private resources.
- **Child abuse prevention and services funding**—That courts and their partner agencies be allowed greater flexibility in the use of federal funds for prevention and to eliminate barriers to coordinating funds for prevention and services.

According to California Supreme Court Associate Justice Carlos R. Moreno, chair of the Blue Ribbon Commission, “One of our lynchpin recommendations is the formation of local foster care commissions in each county – to help with local implementations of reforms and ensure that they are tailored to county needs.” Justice Moreno noted that in December 2008, 50 counties sent multidisciplinary teams to a summit hosted by the commission. “We had 400 participants enthusiastically rise to the challenge of identifying local teams and key issues,” he stated. Most of the county teams have returned home and are taking concrete steps to create local commissions and enact key reforms.

In addition to the formation of local foster care commissions, the Blue Ribbon Commission, California’s first statewide commission to focus on the courts’ role in child welfare, reported on other early progress in implementing its recommendations:

- The Judicial Council directed that work begin and/or continue on implementing 26 of the commission’s recommendations that are within the purview of the judicial branch to implement. The Judicial Council of California also made implementation of the commission’s recommendations on foster care one of its top four legislative priorities for 2009, signaling its commitment to supporting key reforms and mobilizing the judiciary to help implement the recommendations.
- Recently enacted federal legislation—the Fostering Connections to Success Act—directly advances 20 of the commission’s recommendations, including increased support for relative

caregivers, continued supports for foster youth until age 21, and increased educational and other supports.

- A key commission recommendation—ensuring youth participation in court—has begun to be addressed through passage of AB 3051, and a number of local foster care commissions are working to support its implementation.
- Court performance measures, another of the commission’s key recommendations, have been approved and are being implemented in courts across the state.

“The urgent need for action on these recommendations cannot be overstated,” said Justice Moreno. “Nearly half of California’s children in foster care have been in care for more than two years, 17 percent of them for more than three years. Too often these children find themselves in a foster-care limbo, shifted from placement to placement, and separated from siblings, friends, and schools. We simply must act now to fulfill our promise to them—the promise of a brighter future.”

The commission’s final report and action plan, *Fostering a New Future for California’s Children: Ensuring Every Child a Safe, Secure, and Permanent Home*, will be available online at [www.courtinfo.ca.gov/blueribbon](http://www.courtinfo.ca.gov/blueribbon), or can be ordered by calling (415) 865-7739.

#