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# NEWS RELEASE

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## **California Foster Children Continue to “Fall Through the Cracks”**

**Blue Ribbon Commission on Foster Care to Meet in  
Riverside to Probe Reasons for Too Many Children  
Not Receiving Critical Services and Learn about  
Local Efforts to Ensure Agency Collaboration**

***Special Focus on Native American Children, Youth in  
Probation and Children of Incarcerated Mothers***

Riverside—In its sixth quarterly meeting being held in Riverside on June 20-22, 2007, the California Blue Ribbon Commission on Children in Foster Care will examine the issues surrounding too many of California’s 80,000 foster children not receiving critical services and support during their time in foster care. The commission meeting will examine issues that are impacting the delivery of foster care services and learn about efforts in Riverside County to tear down bureaucratic barriers to better serve children and families.

“Riverside County is pioneering collaboration among tribes, courts, probation and prisons—all in an effort to better serve foster children and their families,” said Supreme Court Justice Carlos R. Moreno, chair of the high-level 42-member commission. “We want to learn from them as we identify recommendations that can benefit foster children statewide.”

In a meeting spanning two and a-half days, commissioners will examine various aspects of government collaboration that can better serve children and families. Issues to be explored include those that impact thousands of foster children across the state:

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- **Native American Children**—More than 1,000 Native American children are under the jurisdiction of the State of California for reported child abuse or neglect, yet are often caught in conflicting systems between the state and their local tribes. During its morning meeting on June 22, commissioners will hear from Riverside County and tribal officials regarding their innovative and successful efforts to collaborate on behalf of Native American children and discuss possible statewide solutions.
- **Foster Youth in Probation**—Too many of California’s foster youth “cross over” into the state’s delinquency system, losing child welfare supports and services once they have committed an offense. Two large and very different government systems are involved, and numerous challenges are presented as they struggle to provide for children’s welfare. Commissioners will hear from officials from Riverside County – one of six counties in the state to pioneer new approaches under legislation recently passed – during its opening dinner session on Wednesday, June 20.
- **Foster Children of Incarcerated Mothers**—Many foster children have mothers who are incarcerated in state prisons in California. Most of these mothers will be released after serving relatively short prison terms of approximately 15 months, generally for offenses that are related to substance abuse. When appropriate, reunifying mothers with their children is best for children and avoids children remaining in long-term foster care at significant cost to the state. On Thursday, June 21, commissioners will visit the California Institution for Women to learn about model programs that improve parenting skills of incarcerated mothers and preserve family relationships so that mothers can resume their parental responsibilities.

During their site visit to the California Institution for Women, commissioners will also meet with incarcerated mothers to learn about prison efforts to support family reunification, as well as probe a related issue of the high number of foster youth who end up in prison (1 in 5 foster youth). Most foster youth prison entries are preventable but require access to and coordination among government and community programs. Discussion will focus on the steps that would help foster youth avoid incarceration and contrast the cost of prison (\$44,000 per year) with prevention programs that would avoid prison entry in the first place.

Commissioners will focus on solutions to the challenges that they examine throughout their meeting. At its dinner session on Thursday, June 21, the focus will be on the role of the courts in ensuring local collaboration—given the deciding role that dependency court judges play in every foster care case in the state. The Hon. Sharon McCully, a dependency court judge from Utah, will keynote a presentation on court responsibility and leadership.

Among the specific solutions that commissioners are expected to discuss throughout their meeting are court responsibility in supporting preventive approaches and access to community services that would help families better care for their children, such as alcohol and other drug treatment programs and domestic violence prevention programs; education and mental health supports for foster children; and continuation of foster care benefits for children beyond the age of 18 when they emancipate from care. In addition, commissioners are expected to discuss court responsibility in ensuring that visitation and reunification services are occurring for foster children whose mothers are in prison, and agency efforts to search for kin and others to care for children so that they do not enter foster care unnecessarily.

The California Blue Ribbon Commission on Children in Foster Care was appointed in March 2006 by Chief Justice Ronald M. George to develop recommendations for how courts and their partners can improve foster care outcomes in the state. The commission meets quarterly and is more than half-way through its work. The commission's recommendations are due in spring 2008.

*Media are welcome to attend all portions of the commission meeting with the exception of the site visit to the California Institution for Women, which prison officials have closed to the media. For a full schedule of the commission's meeting, contact Renee Wessels (916) 802-2741 or Joni Pitcl (916) 705-4224.*

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