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2012 – 2013 BUTTE COUNTY GRAND JURY REPORT

BUTTE COUNTY AUDIT

BACKGROUND

To comply with state law, the Grand Jury is required to look at how the county conducts an audit of its operations and the results of that study.

APPROACH

The 2012-13 Grand Jury performed the following activities:

- Reviewed the Butte County Auditor's report for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2012
- Reviewed the Independent Auditor's report for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2012
- Interviewed the Chief Financial Officer and Chief Administrative Officer of Butte County
- Attended the semi-annual meetings of the County Audit Committee of Butte County (September 27, 2012 and April 2, 2013), which included a county supervisor, a partner from the independent auditing firm and the County Auditor

CONCLUSION

The Grand Jury did not detect any material accounting exceptions noted in the Independent Auditor's report that had not been appropriately responded to by the county.

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2012–2013 BUTTE COUNTY GRAND JURY

BUTTE COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF CHILD SUPPORT SERVICES

SUMMARY

The 2012-13 Grand Jury reviewed the operations of the Butte County Department of Child Support Services (LCSA). For clarity in reading, this report refers to the Butte County Department of Child Support Services as LCSA and the California Department of Child Support Services as DCSS. This department receives state and federal funding to perform its duties of enhancing the well-being of children and the self-sufficiency of families. Though it administers state policy, it is staffed and operated by Butte County.

GLOSSARY

- DCSS - California Department of Child Support Services
- LCSA - Local Child Support Agency

BACKGROUND

The state Child Reform Act of 1999 created a new California Department of Child Support Services (DCSS) and moved local administration from the 58 county district attorneys to the newly created Local Child Support Agencies (LCSAs). Butte County is one of the 58 LCSA agencies offering child support programs. Services offered by Butte County include:

- Establishing paternity (fatherhood)
- Locating absent parents
- Requesting child support orders from the court
- Requesting medical support orders from the court
- Enforcing child support orders
- Modifying child support orders
- Enforcing spousal support orders in conjunction with child support
- Providing opportunity for parents to be heard in court on child support matters

Butte County currently has over 12,000 open child support cases and more than 10,500 minor children in the caseload. There are more than 3,500 parents in arrears with child support payments. These arrear cases are open cases until all financial obligations are paid. Over \$16.85 million was distributed to custody parents in fiscal year 2011-12.

APPROACH

The 2012-13 Grand Jury performed the following activities:

- Toured the Butte County LCSA facility
- Reviewed LCSA and DCSS materials
- Interviewed the LCSA management and staff

DISCUSSION

The Butte County Grand Jury was given a tour of the Butte County LCSA facility. The highlights were:

- 1) The Call Center, where custodial, as well as non-custodial parents, call with questions about support payments and changes of status. This call center serves eight counties that share a state computer database. The call center maintains a call-log board so that the intake workers can monitor improvement in their call handling effectiveness.
- 2) Interview rooms, where parents are counseled and made aware of the many county programs that are available to them regarding the raising and support of their children.

The DCSS has the mission to enhance the well-being of children and the self-sufficiency of families by providing professional services to locate parents, establish paternity and establish and enforce court-ordered financial and medical support. The Butte County LCSA has improved its overall ranking of effectiveness in these areas compared to other counties in the state (from 57th to 17th). The time frame of this improvement was 2001-2012.

Both parents have a legal duty to provide support for their children whether they have custody or not. The court may order either or both parents to make regular payments for the child's living and medical expenses. This monthly payment is called Child Support. There are many factors used to determine this amount and the court has at its disposal power to review all assets of each parent or guardian.

The DCSS has an ombudsperson available to explain the parent's rights and responsibilities and to talk about child support concerns. Every family court has a Family Law Facilitator to inform parents and assist in completing court forms. Legal services are free and separate from DCSS. Most communities have child support advocacy groups. The DCSS ombudsperson can help parents contact these groups. Butte County does have its own ombudsperson who can be contacted to resolve issues quickly.

The court process begins when the LCSA files a complaint with the court to obtain a child and/or medical support order. If so ordered by the court, the complaint and an answer form are delivered to the parent. The parent has 30 days to respond to the following options: (1) answer the complaint if the parent disagrees with the judgment, (2)

sign a stipulation if he/she agrees with the judgment or (3) if not in agreement, hire an attorney for representation in court. After the court makes a determination of support and circumstances change regarding a parent's income, the parent may petition the court to review the order and make a new judgment for support. This applies to situations such as changes in income, insurance coverage, medical needs, child care or foster care. Most child support payments are made through employer income withholding, when an employer deducts court-ordered child support payments from the employee's paycheck. The employer pays the amount withheld to the LCSA.

When a child is placed in foster care, the right to child support payments belongs to the state. Any child support collected is first used to pay back the state for foster care benefits received. Any remaining funds are placed in trust by the county welfare office to be used in the best interest of the child. Court-ordered medical support requires the parent paying support to enroll the child in a health insurance plan, if available at a reasonable cost.

Certain circumstances preclude seeking a child support order, such as when the parent or child is in danger. If the welfare department verifies family violence, the LCSA will not seek child support.

Parents seeking, receiving or paying child support must know and understand their responsibilities. They must respond in a timely manner to all requests for information, court orders and any time there is a change in income status or healthcare plans. This helps to insure the quality of life for the child.

The people the Grand Jury interviewed at the Butte County LCSA were satisfied with their caseloads and indicated satisfaction with their jobs. The director did not think more staff would better serve their clients.

FINDINGS

- F1 The Butte County Child Support Call Center is staffed by transferred county personnel, saving Butte County valuable funds.
- F2 The Butte County LCSA has increased its efficiency since 2001, becoming a California LCSAs leader.
- F3 LCSA uses a wide variety of analytical methods to measure and enhance the department's effectiveness.

RECOMMENDATIONS

None

REQUEST FOR RESPONSES

None

2012-2013 BUTTE COUNTY GRAND JURY REPORT

BUTTE COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF EMPLOYMENT AND SOCIAL SERVICES

SUMMARY

The 2012-13 Grand Jury initiated a review of the Butte County Department of Employment and Social Services (DESS) as a result of complaints filed by the public, as well as articles in the press. This review focused on four divisions: Children's Services, Adult Services, Employment Services and Eligibility Services.

BACKGROUND

The Department of Employment and Social Services (DESS) provides employment and social services to the citizens of Butte County. Its goals include preserving the dignity of children, families and adults. With a staff of 628 and a budget of \$142 million, DESS is the largest county department. Most of the department's budget comes from state and federal funds.

All divisions of the department are faced with increasing demands for services, shifting of responsibilities from state to county offices and limited budgets. Butte County's aging population, along with changes to the healthcare system, ensures continued growth in demand for services for the foreseeable future.

Adoption services, previously administered by state agencies, were transferred to the Butte County Children's Services Division in January 2013.

DESS is taking a proactive approach to the increased workload in the Eligibility Services Division. In September 2013, the division will inaugurate a call-in service center and convert to task-based workload assignments. Both of these changes are modeled on a successful program in San Bernardino County.

The Grand Jury was impressed by the dedication and professionalism exhibited by caseworkers and social workers throughout DESS. Because of privacy rules and regulations, DESS and its employees cannot legally respond to accusations made to the press by their clients. This is a particularly difficult problem when children are involved.