



CALIFORNIA STATE AUDITOR

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FACT SHEET

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Report: 2011-101.2

The California State Auditor released the following report today:

Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services *Management Instability Hampered Efforts to Better Protect Children*

BACKGROUND

As part of California's county-administered model of child welfare services (CWS), Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services (department)—under the purview of the Los Angeles County board of supervisors and the California Department of Social Services—provides services to children and families in Los Angeles County, including responding to the more than 80,000 reports of abuse and neglect that it receives every year. The department—like other CWS agencies across California's 58 counties—receives and investigates allegations of child abuse or neglect. The department also provides family preservation services, removes children from unsafe homes, temporarily places these children with relatives or in foster homes, and facilitates legal guardianship or adoption of children into permanent families when appropriate.

KEY FINDINGS

During our review of child protective services in Los Angeles County, we noted the following:

- Although the department generally began investigations of child abuse referrals promptly, it frequently did not complete investigations within required time frames.
 - ✓ It failed to complete 16 of the 30 referrals we reviewed on time—for eight referrals, it did not complete the investigation within 60 days.
 - ✓ It had a backlog of 3,200 uncompleted investigations as of January 2012. The Compton regional office's average number of uncompleted investigations over 30 days old, between July 2009 and November 2011, was more than three times the average of other regional offices.
- Despite completing case visits at least 90 percent of the time for the 30 cases we reviewed, social workers conducted visits at locations outside the home for three or more consecutive months in seven cases—thereby lessening their effectiveness in assessing child safety.
- The department failed to perform all required assessments and criminal background checks before placing children in homes for nine of the 20 placements with a relative that we reviewed.
 - ✓ Between 2008 and 2010, the department assessed and approved fewer than a third of the homes and caregivers before placing children with relatives.
 - ✓ Nearly 900 children lived in homes of relatives that—once assessed by the department—were determined to be unsafe or inappropriate. It typically took 43 days to either remove these children from the placements or reassess and approve the homes.
- The department did not always notify appropriate oversight entities of the abuse or neglect when it investigated referrals and removed children from unsafe homes.
- The department's high turnover in key management positions has hindered its efforts to address challenges. Between 2006 and 2011, turnover among the department's executive management team averaged 25 percent with a high of 45 percent in 2011.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

We made numerous recommendations to the department aimed at ensuring that child abuse and neglect allegations receive timely resolution, including that it monitor its backlog, emphasize completing investigations within 30 days, and assess the number of resources needed and available to investigate allegations. Further, we recommended to the department that it adjust its process for placing children with a relative to adhere to state law and analyze and possibly incorporate other counties' best practices as a means to ensure children are placed only in safe homes. Moreover, the department should report all requisite allegations of abuse or neglect to the appropriate agencies to ensure social workers have relevant information. Finally, we recommended that the director form a stable executive team and that the department create and communicate its strategic plan.

