

San Francisco Board of Supervisors Unanimously Approve Resolution Supporting Statewide Funding for Dependency Courts

May 20, 2016 – San Francisco, CA – On May 17, 2016, the San Francisco Board of Supervisors unanimously passed a resolution in support of additional and sufficient funding for dependency courts locally and statewide. The resolution was introduced by Supervisor Malia Cohen and directed to Governor Jerry Brown, the California State Legislature and the Judicial Council of California.

Dependency courts have the very critical responsibility of ensuring the health and safety of children who have been victims of abuse and neglect and the lack of funding puts California's most vulnerable children and families at serious risk.

The Judicial Council, which oversees the statewide program, is currently unable to sufficiently fund court-mandated dependency counsel. The current funding model allows crushing caseloads of more than 200-400 per attorney, and in some counties as many as 500 clients. The American Bar Association's recommended standard is 100 cases per attorney. To bring caseloads down to 144 per attorney statewide, a new caseload funding model developed by the Judicial Council estimates the need at \$195.8 million, \$60 million more than the prior caseload funding model and \$81 million more than the current budgeted amount of \$114 million.

Despite clear evidence of unmet need, the Judicial Council will only seek an additional \$22 million for this essential service, \$60 million less than their estimated need. As a result, 28 counties, including San Francisco, will suffer significant cuts, even if the \$22 million sought by the Judicial Council is included in the state budget.

In San Francisco, The Bar Association of San Francisco (BASF) oversees the administration of the Dependency Representation Program. The court-appointed attorneys who serve clients in dependency court are underpaid, yet provide excellent legal representation for more than 2,000 children and parents annually. The families in San Francisco's dependency court are poor and disproportionately African American and Latino.

“As a nation and as a state, we have recently come to recognize the disproportionate impact of decades of over-incarceration of African Americans and the devastating effect on their families,” said Yolanda Jackson, BASF executive director. “San Francisco's dependency court serves 47% African American families versus the current population of 5.8% African Americans. California's legal obligation as outlined in Welfare and Institutions Code 317 cannot be met absent sufficient funding; some providers in the state have advised the Judicial Council that they will be unable ‘to continue to provide competent representation’ and will discontinue services if further cuts are implemented. San Francisco's funding is slated for a reduction of more than \$500,000 next year and court-appointed counsel will be unable to meet their legal obligations if funding is in fact reduced.”



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Without the much needed additional state funding, dependency caseloads statewide will remain well above an acceptable standard, providers will continue to lose experienced and highly qualified staff, and, most importantly, families will suffer irreparably.