



December 15, 2021

Debra Baetz
Director, Orange County Social Services Agency
County of Orange
500 N. State College Blvd.
Orange, CA 92868

RE: *Working conditions of CFS Social Workers*

Dear Ms. Baetz:

The Orange County Employees Association (OCEA) is the exclusive representative for most workers in the County Social Services Agency (SSA). The largest SSA classification is the Senior Social Worker (SSW) classification and the vast majority of these workers are assigned to the Children and Family Services (CFS) Division.

For far too long CFS workers have suffered under unreasonable caseloads, unrealistic expectations, an unsupportive workplace culture, and an overall toxic work environment.

Over many years OCEA has sought to resolve these and other related CFS workplace issues through the channels designated by the County. OCEA members have continually presented these issues in detail in the CFS Caseload Management Forum but have been met with frequent resistance and little or no positive change. During bargaining for successor Memorandum of Understanding OCEA has repeatedly proposed bargaining proposals crafted to remedy these long-standing issues but those proposals were consistently rejected by the Agency and the County.

Workplace toxicity has now reached a breaking point. Without immediate action the physical and mental health of CFS workers and the welfare of those who rely on them risk being seriously compromised.

The challenges span across the entire Division but are particularly acute in the Emergency Response Program, where clients often first encounter the Agency. We have attached a summary of specific workplace issues in the Emergency Response Program, including specific straightforward and easily implemented proposed actions to resolve those issues. While each CFS program has its own unique issues which need to be addressed, we believe the Agency can best demonstrate a genuine commitment to its workers by aggressively seeking resolution to the serious intolerable conditions that exist in Emergency Response.

The toxic work environment throughout CFS, particularly in Emergency Response, has robbed workers of the time necessary to achieve the positive outcomes the County desires and the community needs. None of us can afford to allow CFS workers to continue to be subjected to an intolerable work environment.

We want to help the Agency provide high quality services to the community. For that to occur, the Agency must recommit to help social workers by providing them safe and supportive working conditions.

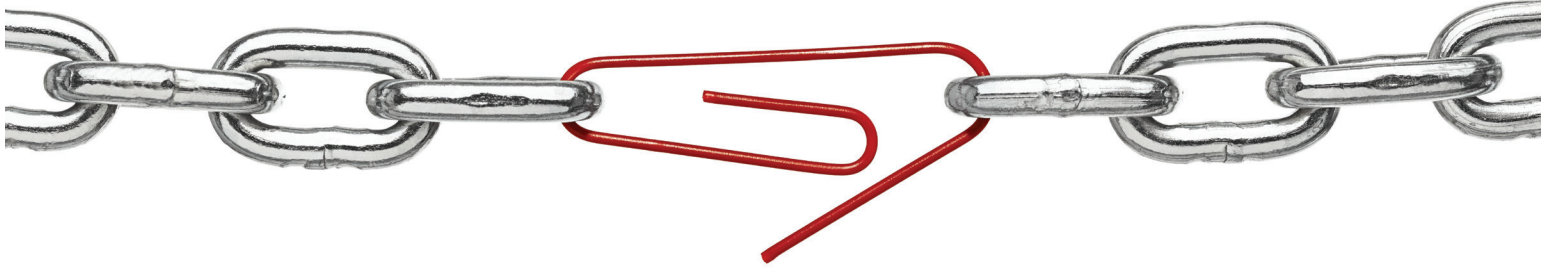
We therefore demand immediate and tangible improvements to the conditions of Senior Social Workers in CFS and look forward to collaborating with you to that end.

Sincerely,

Charles Barfield
General Manager

ORANGE COUNTY SOCIAL SERVICES AGENCY

OVERALL CFS DEMANDS



“THE EXPECTATIONS ARE BECOMING MORE AND MORE UNREASONABLE. THEY KEEP ADDING ONE LITTLE THING AFTER ANOTHER NOT REALIZING HOW OVERWHELMING THE JOB IS BECOMING.”

- ORANGE COUNTY SOCIAL WORKER

CFS SOCIAL WORKER DEMANDS:

ADOPTIONS | CHILD ABUSE REGISTRY | COURT SERVICES | EMERGENCY PLACEMENT | EMERGENCY RESPONSE
FAMILY MAINTENANCE COLLABORATIVE SERVICES—DIFF RESP & FCIM | FAMILY MAINTENANCE COLLABORATIVE SERVICES—VFS | INTEGRATED CONTINUING SERVICES (ICS)
PERMANENCY SERVICES PROGRAM (PSP)—CONTINUING | PERMANENCY SERVICES PROGRAM (PSP)—COLLABORATIVE COURT | RESOURCE FAMILY APPROVAL (RFA)
SPECIALIZED FAMILY SERVICES (SFS)SPECIAL MEDICAL | TRANSITIONAL PLANNING SERVICES PROGRAM | VISITATION SUPPORT SERVICES

**OCEA EXPECTS STARRED ITEMS TO BE INITIATED WITHIN 60 DAYS*

*CASELOADS

ESTABLISH A CASELOAD DISTRIBUTION PHILOSOPHY AND IMPLEMENT A CASELOAD YARDSTICK TO INCLUDE CASE CAPS WHICH, IF HIT, WOULD TRIGGER PROTECTIONS AND BENEFITS FOR WORKERS.

*REASONABLE EXPECTATIONS

ASSESS THE EXPECTATIONS FOR EACH TYPE OF CASE/ASSIGNMENT AND ESTABLISH A REASONABLE WORKLOAD PER CASE/ASSIGNMENT.

STAFFING

HIRE ENOUGH STAFF TO MEET CASELOAD YARDSTICK STANDARDS, KEEP UP WITH ATTRITION, AND HAVE ADEQUATE COVERAGE WHILE WORKERS TAKE TIME OFF.

*CLASS & COMP

CONDUCT A CLASSIFICATION & COMPENSATION STUDY FOR THE SOCIAL WORKER JOB SERIES.

OVERTIME

PAY OUT OVERTIME, DON'T REQUIRE SOCIAL WORKERS TO FLEX OUT THEIR TIME.

TRANSFERS

REVISE THE CFS TRANSFER POLICY TO ELIMINATE TIME LIMITS REQUIRED TO STAY IN A PROGRAM.

COUNSELING

IMPROVE THE QUANTITY AND QUALITY OF COUNSELING/THERAPY SERVICES AND INCORPORATE IT INTO THE WORK.

MANAGEMENT CULTURE

IMPROVE LABOR-MANAGEMENT RELATIONS WITH A FOCUS ON COMPASSION AND SUPPORT. SHOW COMPASSION THROUGH ACTION. LISTEN TO EMPLOYEES AND IMPLEMENT THEIR IDEAS.

ALL PROPOSALS ARE AIMED AT RETAINING EXISTING EMPLOYEES, ATTRACTING NEW EMPLOYEES, AND CREATING FAIRNESS AND RESPECT IN THE WORKPLACE.

THE FOLLOWING DEMANDS PERTAINED TO SPECIFIC ISSUES IN THE EMERGENCY RESPONSE PROGRAM:

URGENT DEMANDS IN EMERGENCY RESPONSE

The following demands would provide some immediate relief and OCEA expects implementation within the next 60 days:

1. **PROVIDE CLERICAL SUPPORT**—Utilize clerical staff to make “shells” and collect priors. This could save a Social Worker 1-6 hours of work.
2. **PROVIDE SOCIAL WORKER II SUPPORT**—Temporarily assign two (2) SWII’s to each Emergency Response program (i.e., ER I, II, III) to assist with interviewing non-offending and at-risk youth, make phone calls, and schedule home assessments. Take away the restrictions placed on SWII’s so they can assist as needed without being required to get authorization for each tasks.
3. **INTAKE DAYS**—Continue to protect a Social Worker by having them off rotation on an intake day. Extend the intake narrative deadline from 11 a.m.-5 p.m., so workers do not need to begin their workday earlier than their assigned start time to meet the deadline.
4. **TRAUMA INFORMED COUNSELING**—Like other first responder departments, provide all investigating Social Workers who support the Emergency Response program with County-offered trauma focused counseling.
5. **CREATE EFFICIENCIES IN DOCUMENTATION THROUGH TECHNOLOGY:**
 - a. Pilot lightweight tablets with the ability to write on the screen and convert to text.
 - b. Provide dictation software at a Social Worker’s request without a medical restriction/note.

ADDITIONAL LONG-TERM DEMANDS ARE ALSO BEING DISCUSSED INCLUDING TRUTHFUL JOB DESCRIPTIONS, MONETARY INCENTIVES, WORK/LIFE BALANCE, CONSISTENT SCHEDULES, REVAMPING THE PM SHIFT, COUNSELING AND THERAPY, ENCOURAGING TIME-OFF, STREAMLINED BUSINESS PRACTICES, AND REVAMPING CAR REFERRAL ASSIGNMENT PROCESSES.