



For Immediate Release

June 28, 2023

Sacramento County and the Youth Law Center reach a settlement agreement on ending the placement of children and youth in foster care in unlicensed facilities including the Warren E. Thornton (WET) Youth Center.

A Stipulated Judgement is approved by the California Superior Court with five-years of oversight.

SACRAMENTO, Calif. -- The following joint statement was issued today regarding the June 26 actions by the California Superior Court, Honorable Shelleyanne W.L. Chang, approving a stipulated Final Judgment agreed to by both parties:

Sacramento County and the Youth Law Center have been in negotiations since March 2023 about ending the practice of placing children and youth in the foster care system in unlicensed facilities including the Warren E. Thornton Youth Center (WET Youth Center) because both parties want what is best for children, youth, and families.

Sacramento County has had youth in various unlicensed settings over the past several years. Far from ideal and contrary to law, the County had not been able to build or develop the placement capacity, community-based supports and the family finding programs needed for children and youth in our child welfare systems. Placing children at the WET Youth Center was a continuation of an attempt at a short-term fix to provide a safe place for youth who had no other place to go.

Both parties hope that this settlement agreement marks a turning point in Sacramento County, ending a practice of placing children in unlicensed settings that has been going on for years. Sacramento County has made significant strides in making investments in community-based supports, robust family finding and engagement, and home-based, emergency-placement options. Sacramento has been approaching this problem across multiple systems, and it is the hope that such collaboration between systems, providers, advocates, and the court will help ensure that youth in Sacramento County have what they need to thrive in the community. Looking forward, the County's continued investment in building home-based placement capacity, renewed efforts in intensive family and non-related family member finding and increased intensive mental health services for youth in the foster care system is a great step forward.

Sacramento County is taking the necessary first steps to come out of this situation a stronger system more capable of providing children in care the supports and services they need. We believe this settlement agreement will continue to help prioritize these issues to strengthen the County and to support the County's commitment that these practices will not happen again.

We all agree the practice of youth staying in unlicensed settings is not okay and that the County need to creates viable and sustainable strategies; it can and will do better for our youth in foster care.

Background:

In March 2023, the Youth Law Center sent Sacramento County a demand letter regarding the placement of youth in the foster care system into unlicensed settings. The letter specifically described the undesirable conditions at the WET Youth Center. Since that time, Sacramento County and the Youth Law Center, on behalf of Petitioner and Plaintiff Sade Daniels, have engaged in good faith efforts to resolve the issues related to the unlicensed WET Youth Center.

Both parties decided it would be best for children and youth currently at the WET Youth Center (and those who might be placed there in the future) to quickly resolve the situation and avoid uncertainty, time, trouble, and expenses of further litigation.

For these reasons, and especially for the health, safety and well-being of children and youth, on June 7, the Youth Law Center took legal action by filing a Petition for Writ of Mandate and Complaint for Declaratory and Injunctive Relief against the County, to require the County to comply with its legal obligations and prevent the operation of unlicensed facilities in the future.

On the same day, the Youth Law Center and the County agreed to a stipulated Final Judgment, a legal document that was filed with the California Superior Court and approved on June 27.

The hope is that this legal settlement with court oversight marks a new chapter in Sacramento County that includes licensed emergency placements, increased community and family-like settings, expanded community based therapeutic supports and robust family finding and engagement.

The County understands that if the terms of the Final Judgment are not completed in a timely manner and maintained, the Youth Law Center can ask the Court to take further action for breach of the settlement agreement.

The terms of the Final Judgment have the full force of the rule of law. Both parties have agreed to 15 overarching actions, some with specific details. The agreement's provisions include:

- Requiring the County to safely transition any youth at the WET Youth Center to appropriate, licensed settings – including moving them to family-like settings with supports whenever possible. [This was accomplished by Friday, June 16th].
- Discontinuing the use of the WET Youth Center to house foster youth and providing youth who have been previously placed there with ongoing therapeutic supports. [As of June 16, the WET Youth Center is no longer used as a foster care placement].
- No longer placing foster children in unlicensed settings going forward.
- Providing specialized community based therapeutic supports to all children and youth in foster care, including those placed at the WET Youth Center during their final stay and throughout the transition period and those who were formally placed at the WET Youth Center.
- Establishing clear deadlines for each item in the agreement, conducting quarterly meetings to review the terms of the Stipulated Judgment and accessing data to be able to monitor foster care placements by relatives/kin, any unlicensed placements, records of mental health services, among other data points to track the overall.

The Court will retain jurisdiction over the Stipulated Judgment for five years, during which time the Youth Law Center can decide on further legal action should the County not meet the terms of the agreement.

The County's Department of Child, Family, and Adult Services (DCFAS) in collaboration with the Department of Health Services (DHS), has established several new practices to better help children, youth and families including:

- Providing intensive wraparound support services for all youth at the WET Youth Center and those who were placed there previously.
- Making available Therapeutic Behavioral Services (TBS) and community-based supports for all youth who have been placed at the WET Youth Center and any youth in foster care who experiences a "critical incident" that might lead to placement instability.
- DCFAS is working with several technical assistance providers to help create more robust family finding and engagement practices and to expand the accessibility of peer supports for family and youth through new entitlements available through CalAIM; and,
- DCFAS and DHS are working with consultants and community-based partners to create licensed emergency placement options that are home-based, family-like and that can provide the mental health services to meet the needs of our youth, so the County no longer needs to rely on the use of unlicensed settings.

Additional steps will be taken by the County as a part of the WET Youth Center agreement within days of the final agreement.

Sacramento County's Department of [Child, Family and Adult Services](#) provides services and supports to promote the safety, health and well-being of children, families, dependent adults and older adults. Services focus on promoting protective factors, strengthening families, and supporting dependent adults and older adults to live with dignity and respect in home-based or least restrictive settings.

The [Youth Law Center](#) is a national civil rights legal advocacy based in San Francisco that works for and in collaboration with youth to transform foster care and juvenile justice systems so that every child can thrive. For more information and for direct links to the Court filings: https://www.ylc.org/ylc_sacramento_county_settlement_agreement/.

For additional information, copies of the Court proceedings or to schedule media interviews, contact:

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