

The Evolving Landscape of Child Welfare Podcast  
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**Kelly Meehleib:** Welcome to the Judicial Council's Center for Families, Children & the Courts podcast series on juvenile law. We are fortunate to have Greg Rose with us today. Greg is Deputy Director of the Children and Family Services Division at the California Department of Social Services overseeing the implementation of statewide child welfare policy. Welcome, Greg.

**Greg Rose:** Thank you for having me here.

**Kelly Meehleib:** There are a lot of things happening in the child welfare world, how would you describe the new landscape of child welfare?

**Greg Rose:** I would describe it as evolving and dynamic. I mean, if you think about what we see every year, there's twenty or thirty laws that are signed into law almost every year. Some big and some small. They change and evolve our system a bit. We've been working for a while on our Continuum of Care Reform work as well. And then, as that was happening, a new federal law came in, the Family First Prevention and Services Act, that we have to implement simultaneously with CCR and last year's new laws. So, I would say, it's dynamic and evolving.

**Kelly Meehleib:** And in this landscape there seems to be a lot of different initiatives or reforms that are working together. We often hear of the Continuum of Care Reform, Resource Family Approval, and the Quality Parenting Initiative. How are these related?

**Greg Rose:** Right. Well, first, let's talk a little bit about each one and then talk about how they're related, how's that? So, you know, the Continuum of Care Reform is really meant to realize the idea that children should grow up in families, families should be supported by communities, and in those instances where a young person needs a much more structured environment to heal from trauma, then we need high quality residential programs.

The Resource Family Approval Act process was really thinking about, in addition to making sure people had, you know, in essence a clean background check and a safe physical plan, it was intended to understand who those parents are, their approach to parenting, and some of their own history that might influence the way that they parent. What their values are, etcetera.

And then, the Quality Parenting Initiative is really one that acknowledges that the primary intervention we have for most young people is parenting. And if that's our primary intervention it ought to be quality. If the notion of the Continuum of Care Reform is that kids need to be in families, then we want to make sure that families have the ability to love, care, and nurture that young person.

The Resource Family Approval process allows us to get to know the families, so that we can identify their strengths, their challenges. And it helps us, then, support them to provide a safe and nurturing environment for someone to live in. And it helps us, then, support them through,

also, training and other kinds of things. So, each family, then, we get to know and have a sense of how we can support them to be successful.

And then, the Quality Parenting Initiative, the key to this one, right, is, as I said before, it's – parenting is our primary intervention for most kids. The beauty of the QPI initiative is that parents are actually, you know, brought into the county as, you know, genuine partners. It's acknowledged that they have a lot to offer, they have their own perspectives about the young person and about the system. And so, at the case level there's a partnership agreement and it describes who is responsible for what, both on the county and the caregiver side. And at the system level, the QPI initiative also allows for county leadership to understand kind of what's working, what's not working, where supports are needed, where training is needed, both from a content standpoint and a geographic standpoint. So, they all really work together to support young people to be in healthy, loving, nurturing families so that they can heal from trauma.

**Kelly Meehleib:** What should the court and court partners know about these initiatives?

**Greg Rose:** For court and court partners – I think it's really important for them to understand that at the core of all of this work it's about listening to families, listening to young people in care, and supporting them to meet the needs of the young people. And so, it's helpful to understand that, so that their interactions with our county colleagues, our state colleagues, and others – that at the core they know it's about engagement, and potentially they can hold us all accountable for that authentic engagement.

KM: And how can they help meet the goals of these initiatives?

**Greg Rose:** So, a couple of ways. I think one way is to be well-informed. So, ask questions. Ask questions about what these things are. Ask questions about how they're going. Ask the same question you asked me earlier, how do they interact? They also can, as they identify problems or gaps, they can or bring them to the county leadership, to state leadership. And I think one of the things I've learned over the years from being at Beyond the Bench is that judges, especially, often convene groups. People rarely say no to the judge's invitation. And so, in some of the areas of these reform efforts, if the judge notices or folks in the court notice that things aren't running as smoothly as they could, I think having a conversation with key parties is really helpful.

And I would say, you know, I would look for evidence of these kinds of things, actually, in court reports. Look to see if, you know—we didn't talk about child and family teaming, but it was the voice of the young person voiced? Is there evidence of that? Is there evidence that additional supports were provided, needed? Take a look at court documents to see if they look cookie cutter or if they look more unique. All of these things are, kind of, key to get a sense of how things are working.

And, I think if the courts and the court partners are on board with the notion that kids do best in families, kids and families heal from trauma in safe environments, and that services and supports, whether they're clinical or non-clinical, whether they're done by professionals or whether they're provided by paraprofessionals or other supports, if they believe in those notions

then, the ways I described earlier, I think, will help them hold people accountable and potentially hold themselves accountable too.

**Kelly Meehleib:** We are starting to hear a lot about the Family First Prevention Services Act. How does this act add to the changing landscape of child welfare?

**Greg Rose:** So, the Family First Prevention and Services Act, we often think of, kind of, two big buckets. There's lots of parts to the bill, lots of start dates and implementation dates, etcetera, to the law. For the purpose of this conversation I'll talk about two areas. One, the prevention services area and the other one is the congregate care provisions. It's important to note that in order to get access to the prevention services dollars you have to implement the congregate care reforms as well. Lots of talk even in the bill's title or in the law's title. And lots of talk around the state and the nation about access to prevention services.

So, the important part to know, I think, about this first bucket, the prevention services bucket, is that for the first time ever, states and counties and tribes are able to use funding that was historically reserved only for out of home care and supervision of young people, that can actually be used for services now. There are a number of criteria in which to use the services; the young person needs to be deemed a candidate for foster care and only services for parents that meet certain evidence standards can be used.

And then, on the congregate care side of the equation it's very similar to what we've been doing in our Continuum of Care Reform, in terms of having integrated mental health services at the residential program.

Families First also does a couple of additional things. Number one, it requires aftercare services so that when young people are discharged from the residential program, a certain set of services can follow them or that they should be able to access to ease their transition back into the community. It requires nursing care to be available 24/7, as required by the program, and so there needs to be some thought about how nurses fit into our model here. It requires a different kind of gatekeeper, if you will, to get into the residential program. The law requires that there's a qualified individual that's not associated with the provider, or the state or county, that does an assessment and that assessment then determines whether or not the young person meets the criteria for residential programs. And in our state, we use an inter county placement committee and we're looking at some options of how we can use the inter county placement committee and also meet their criteria for the qualified individual.

The other things that I would just mention that folks often don't talk about but I think are really important as well – there are some smaller provisions in the bill that allow us, for the first time ever, to offer services for young people who are pregnant or parenting. And potentially are able, then, to provide some legitimate preventive services to avoid any kinds of trauma that would have their kid or child end up in in the foster care system.

It also allows for women who – largely women but could be dads too—so it allows for parents who are in a substance use disorder treatment program, a residential program, we can now fund the care and supervision of their child even though their child is not a dependent through this

act. And so, that, you know, if you think about the theme of earlier of our conversation about the value of that children should be with family and parents and we need to support them in different ways Family First does a bit of that. It's clearly not the answer. It's a very small piece of the overall puzzle, but it is it is something.

**Kelly Meehleib:** Well, Greg, thank you so much for spending time with us today to talk about child welfare. For those of you listening that would like to learn more about these programs please visit the courts website at [www.courts.ca.gov](http://www.courts.ca.gov) and visit the material under programs for families and children. Or visit the California Department of Social Services website at [www.cdss.ca.gov](http://www.cdss.ca.gov). Thank you so much.