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County Grand Jury Looks at Foster Care and Adoption Process

How are children placed into foster care in Ventura County? Are foster parents given priority when a child in their care comes up for adoption? Are nine-year-old children mature enough to choose the best future home for themselves?

A public complaint led the 2014-2015 Ventura County Grand Jury to seek answers to these and other questions about the County of Ventura Human Services Agency's foster care policies and procedures. The grand jury sought to learn how children are placed in foster care and later either reunited with their families or adopted by their foster parents or other families.

The grand jury conducted this investigation by interviewing foster parents and management personnel from the Human Services Agency. It also reviewed applicable legal codes, various agency websites and news articles and publications related to foster care and adoption.

The grand jury found that when foster parents decide to adopt a child in their care, they don't always know what's involved—for example, that a six-to-eight-month study of their home is required. Inadequate communication among the foster parents, HSA, the superior court and various private and religious organizations may result in times when foster parents don't know their child's correct status, nor their own. Further, foster parents who want to adopt the child in their care often expect to be given priority. The gap between foster parents' expectations and reality causes some foster parents to become confused and disillusioned.

(more)

Children nine years old and older may give input as to where they are placed for adoption; the grand jury found this age too young. Many nine-year-old children are not at the appropriate maturity level to know what's best for their welfare and their input may be misleading.

At the conclusion of its investigation, the grand jury made several recommendations:

- that the HSA work more closely with foster care parents by providing training on the processes necessary for adoption and actions needed to complete a home study;
- that the County of Ventura Board of Supervisors direct the HSA to work more closely with all other organizations involved in foster care and adoption to ensure there is communication and input from all parties concerned with the foster child. Foster parents' input should be included in court proceedings, either by having them present or having HSA represent their interests; and
- that the supervisors direct county counsel to review the age at which foster children are allowed input into the adoption process, raising it from age 9 to age 12.

The complete report, "Foster Care and Adoption in Ventura County," may be accessed at <http://www.ventura.org/grand-jury>; click on the "Annual Reports" tab and consult "Fiscal Year 2014-2015."

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