



NEWS

Judicial Council of California
ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE OF THE COURTS
Public Information Office
(415) 865-7740

Lynn Holton, Public Information Officer

Release Date: May 20, 2004

Release Number: 29

Judicial Council Commends Groundbreaking New Study on Nation's Foster Care System

*Pew Commission makes major recommendations on
Federal financing and court oversight of foster care*

San Francisco—A national study released this week by the Pew Commission on Children in Foster Care—with far-reaching recommendations to overhaul the nation's foster care system—has won the support of the Judicial Council of California, the policymaking body for state courts.

The Judicial Council voted to commend the Pew Commission for its comprehensive analysis and recommendations on improving outcomes for children in foster care and “pledges that the judicial branch will work with state and local entities and community partners to realize the commission goals, and urges Congress to act on the recommendations as an entire package.”

At a ceremony yesterday in Washington D.C., the Pew Commission unveiled a comprehensive plan that focuses on flexible federal financing to encourage more permanent placement options for abused and neglected children and court reforms that would give children a higher priority in the judicial system.

“Issues involving families and children permeate our judicial system, and only recently have we begun focusing on broad strategies to address the needs of abused and neglected children, the most vulnerable members of our society,” stated Chief Justice Ronald M. George, chair of the Judicial Council. “I am confident that the work and recommendations of the Pew Commission will bring about significant improvements in the foster care system in this country.”

“The Pew Commission has provided a rare opportunity for extensive review of the federal financing and state court oversight of our nation's foster care system,” declared William C. Vickrey, Administrative Director of the California Courts. “The findings and recommendations are an opportunity that must not be lost so that we can achieve significant and measurable benefits for our children and families.”

(over)

A member of the Pew Commission, Mr. Vickrey continued: “The report underscores the need for meaningful reform—half a million children in foster care will remain there for at least two years and will be bounced to three or more homes. The commission’s proposals will provide the flexibility for more permanent solutions for abused and neglected children. States will be able to invest in prevention, early intervention, and permanence. And money will be spent to meet the individual needs of children to ensure their safety, stability, and security.” *(Mr. Vickrey’s complete statement is attached.)*

Foster care protects children who are not safe in their own homes. For some, it is life-saving. But for too many children, what should be a short-term refuge becomes a long-term saga, involving multiple moves, the Pew Commission stated. This turbulence and uncertainty can have lasting consequences, for which children and society pay a price.

Created in May 2003, the Pew Commission on Children in Foster Care is a national, nonpartisan panel funded by the Pew Charitable Trusts and composed of leading experts in child welfare. Proposed reforms will have far-reaching effects for children in foster care and is a critical first step to solving many other problems that plague the child welfare system.

“The nation’s foster care system is unquestionably broken,” stated Commission Chairman Bill Frenzel (R-MN), a 20-year veteran of Congress and former Ranking Minority Member of the House Budget Committee. “The Commission’s recommendations focus on what states and courts must do to help children get safe and permanent homes.”

For more information about the Pew Commission on Children in Foster Care, or to obtain a copy of the commission’s report, visit the commission Web site at www.pewfostercare.org.

The Judicial Council is the policymaking body of the California courts, the largest court system in the nation. Under the leadership of the Chief Justice and in accordance with the California Constitution, the council is responsible for ensuring the consistent, independent, impartial, and accessible administration of justice. The Administrative Office of the Courts carries out the official actions of the council and promotes leadership and excellence in court administration.

#

**Statement by Mr. William C. Vickrey on
Report by Pew Commission on Children in Foster Care**

Mr. Vickrey is Administrative Director of the California Courts and has been a member of the Pew Commission on Children in Foster Care since its creation in May 2003.

The Pew Commission has provided a rare opportunity for extensive review of the federal financing and state court oversight of our nation's foster care system. The findings and recommendations are an opportunity that must not be lost so that we can achieve significant and measurable benefits for our children and families.

The report underscores the need for meaningful reform—half a million children in foster care will remain there for at least two years and will be bounced to three or more homes. The commission's proposals will provide the flexibility for more permanent solutions for abused and neglected children. States will be able to invest in prevention, early intervention, and permanence. And money will be spent to meet the individual needs of children to ensure their safety, stability, and security.

Our state judges play a critical role in protecting children who are abused or neglected. The proposals enhance the priority of children's cases while providing the courts with improved information, broader training opportunities for judges and staff, and other tools necessary to ensure the effective participation of children, families, and social service agencies in the judicial process.

California alone has more than 100,000 children in foster care, approximately one-fifth of the nation's foster children. In its new Operational Plan, the Judicial Council of California has established a number of goals for juvenile justice:

- **Improving courts' management of family and children's cases, with particular emphasis on unifying and coordinating court procedures.** This goal includes establishing and evaluating case management systems in at least six "mentor courts"; assessing the status of calendar management, coordination, and communication in at least six family and juvenile courts; and ensuring compliance with court orders to protect vulnerable parties (such as minors' compromises.)
- **Improving courts' management of dependency and delinquency cases.** This goal includes developing a comprehensive plan for reducing the number of children in dependency cases and implementing uniform standards for the performance and oversight of court-appointed counsel in dependency and delinquency proceedings.

The Pew Commission's proposals will dramatically improve the ability of California courts to work effectively with local and state agencies to help protect children by establishing permanent, safe, stable, and secure homes for all children at risk. It is my hope that Congress will act quickly to implement the Commission's comprehensive recommendations.