



## Assemblyman Tom Lackey 34<sup>th</sup> District

### AB 779: DCFS Domestic Violence Consultant Program

#### **Background**

In the child welfare system, survivors of domestic violence may face allegations of neglect if the court finds that their failure to protect the child stems from the abusive conditions imposed by another adult in the household. This dynamic can lead to child removals, which often result in further trauma for both survivors and their children.

The Department of Child and Family Services (DCFS) Domestic Violence Consultant Program emerged from a 2020 collaboration between the UCLA Pritzker Center and Los Angeles County stakeholders to address the role of domestic violence within the child welfare system.

The Antelope Valley (AV) was selected as a key focus area due to its unique challenges, including resource gaps and a high prevalence of domestic violence-related emergency room visits. The AV also houses the largest number of foster care placements, as children throughout Los Angeles County are often placed in the AV; this may further strain service systems.

#### **Problem**

Child welfare organizations often face significant challenges in addressing domestic violence and its impact on families, and in the AV:

- Children represent 27% of the population, and more than one in five children live in poverty (American Community Survey, 2022).
- The AV Hospital consistently reports the highest rate of emergency room visits prompted by domestic violence, treating individuals from within and outside of LA County.
- Families in the AV often face intersecting issues, due to a multitude of reasons, such as homelessness, substance abuse, and trauma, which complicate domestic violence cases.
- Emergency Response (ER) Children's Social Workers (CSWs) often lack specialized guidance for addressing the unique needs of families experiencing domestic violence, leading to inconsistent interventions and outcomes.

Through the collaboration with UCLA, a Community-Based Organization, Valley Oasis (VO), placed staff at the local DCFS office to serve as a domestic violence consultant for consultations on cases involving domestic violence.

Consultations focus on understanding family dynamics, addressing complicating factors (e.g., homelessness, substance use), and implementing protective measures like safety plans or restraining orders. A reciprocal training component ensured that both DCFS staff and VO personnel shared expertise, which improved service delivery and outcomes. The program demonstrated the potential to enhance knowledge of domestic violence and to provide sensitive, family-centered interventions.

Survivors received direct support, including shelter access, referrals to trauma-informed therapy for children, and education on domestic violence resources. Additionally, attention was given to provide preventative services to avoid further child welfare intervention if appropriate.

#### **Solution**

AB 779 seeks to replicate the Domestic Violence Consultant Program in additional regional child welfare offices across Los Angeles County. This bill will establish similar partnerships between DCFS offices and local domestic violence service providers to ensure that families experiencing domestic violence receive the tailored support they need.

This expansion would help address systemic gaps, improve outcomes for families, and enhance the child welfare system's capacity to respond to domestic violence effectively.

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