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February 11, 2025

The Honorable John Harabedian
Chair, Joint Legislative Audit Committee
1020 N Street, Room 107
Sacramento, CA 95814

**RE: Request for Audit of San Diego County Child and Family Well-Being Operations,
Including Polinsky Children's Center**

Dear Chairman Harabedian:

I am writing to respectfully request that the Joint Legislative Audit Committee direct the California State Auditor to conduct a thorough and independent audit of the San Diego County Child and Family Well-Being Department (formerly Child Welfare Services), including operations at the Polinsky Children's Center and related juvenile care facilities.

This audit should determine whether the County has properly protected children in its custody, managed public funds responsibly, and implemented effective oversight and accountability measures to prevent abuse.

The San Diego County Child and Family Well-Being Department has not been formally audited in more than a decade, with a 2015 internal review only resulting in a five-page report with no public findings or recommendations. Last year, a similar five-page report was released and included no findings or recommendations. It is crucial that the department be audited to ensure the children and families of San Diego County are given the best care.

Recent reporting indicates that over 100 lawsuits have been filed by former minors alleging sexual assault, coercion, grooming, and other abuse by staff while in County custody. Records show that the County has paid at least \$11.7 million since 2018 in settlements related to abuse and neglect, yet internal reviews have been limited, superficial, and without public release or meaningful findings. The frequency and severity of these allegations raise urgent concerns about systemic failures in supervision, reporting, and child safety measures.

We request that the audit examine, at a minimum, the following questions:

1. What policies and procedures are in place to hire, screen, train, and supervise staff at Polinsky Children's Center and other County juvenile care facilities?
2. How effective have internal audits, inspections, and investigations been in identifying and addressing abuse, neglect, or misconduct?
3. How are allegations of abuse received, documented, investigated, and reported, and has the County complied with all state licensing and reporting requirements?
4. To what extent has the County acted to prevent abuse after prior substantiated reports or violations?
5. What specific financial costs has the County incurred related to lawsuits, settlements, legal fees, and related expenses stemming from abuse allegations?
6. How are children in County custody monitored to ensure their safety, and are staffing ratios, supervision practices, and training sufficient to prevent abuse?
7. What systemic weaknesses or mismanagement may have contributed to ongoing allegations and lawsuits, and what steps has the County taken to correct them?
8. Are current accountability and oversight measures adequate to protect children and reduce future risk of abuse or financial liability to taxpayers?

The audit should provide detailed findings and actionable recommendations to improve child safety, strengthen accountability, and reduce taxpayer exposure to further legal claims. The public and the Legislature have a right to know whether San Diego County is fulfilling its responsibility to protect its most vulnerable children.

If you have any questions or require additional information, please contact Zach Kerkhoff at Zachary.Kerkhoff@asm.ca.gov or (916) 319-2075.

Sincerely,



Carl DeMaio

Assemblyman, 75th District