



# CALIFORNIA STATE AUDITOR

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# FACT SHEET

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Report: 2011-101.1

The California State Auditor released the following report today:

## Child Welfare Services

*California Can and Must Provide Better Protection and Support for Abused and Neglected Children*

### BACKGROUND

Child welfare services (CWS) agencies—which include programs for child protective services—across California's 58 counties received 480,000 allegations of child abuse or neglect in 2010 and, along with local law enforcement, make immediate decisions about whether to remove a child from his or her home. While each county establishes and maintains its own program for CWS, the Department of Social Services (Social Services) monitors and provides support through oversight, administrative services, and development of program policies and regulations. Among other duties, Social Services provides oversight from early intervention activities to permanent placement services, and provides oversight and regulatory enforcement for more than 85,000 licensed community care facilities statewide, including licensing foster and group homes that house children removed from unsafe homes.

### KEY FINDINGS

During our review of the child protective services programs in Sacramento, Alameda, and Fresno counties and Social Services, we noted the following:

- Despite a recommendation we made in 2008, Social Services does not use the Department of Justice's (Justice) sex offender registry to identify sex offenders who may be inappropriately living or working in its licensed facilities and foster homes. In July 2011 we found over 1,000 address matches and alerted Social Services. Social Services and county CWS agencies investigated the matches and are taking action as needed.
- Social Services is struggling to visit community care facilities at least once every five years as required. The number of overdue inspections has been increasing since the beginning of 2010.
- Although the three counties generally performed required background checks before placing children in foster homes and appeared to remove children quickly when needed, they did not always timely notify Social Services of allegations involving its licensees and forward required information regarding instances of abuse or neglect to Justice.
- The percentage of children placed with private foster family agencies—agencies that recruit and certify foster homes and are compensated at a higher rate than state- or county-licensed foster homes—has dramatically increased over the last 10 years and resulted in an additional \$327 million in foster care payments during that time. The counties we visited admit to placing children with these agencies out of convenience rather than for elevated treatment needs as originally intended.
- Although the county CWS agencies we visited generally complied with state regulations and county policies when investigating and managing cases, they need to improve the timeliness of investigations and consistency of ongoing case management visits.

### KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

We make numerous recommendations to Social Services including that it conduct regular address comparisons using Justice's sex offender registry and its licensing database, and that it complete follow-up on any remaining address matches we provided. We further recommend that Social Services complete comprehensive reviews of agencies' licensing activities more timely as well as on-site reviews of state-licensed foster homes, foster family agencies, and group homes. Moreover, Social Services should ensure that rates paid to private foster family agencies are appropriate and should monitor placements with these agencies. To the county CWS agencies, we recommend that all agencies perform child death reviews for children with CWS histories to improve their practices.

