

County of Santa Clara

Social Services Agency

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DATE: May 7, 2024

TO: Honorable Board of Supervisors

FROM: Damion Wright, Director, Department of Family and Children's Services

SUBJECT: Joint Response Protocol and eSCARS

At its February 6, 2024 meeting, the Board of Supervisors (Board) requested the Department of Family and Children's Services (DFCS) report back on efforts to collaborate with the District Attorney's Office and local law enforcement agencies on interagency coordination and cooperation, and in particular, the implementation of the joint response protocol, as well as the proposal to implement the eSCARS in Santa Clara County.

Joint Response Protocol

Santa Clara County has a Child Abuse Protocol that was adopted on April 13, 2023 by the Police Chiefs' Association of Santa Clara County, DFCS, and other agencies. Within the protocol are procedures outlining joint response protocol for law enforcement and child welfare, which is when both law enforcement and DFCS must respond to a situation within sixty minutes. In Calendar Year (CY) 2023, there were 254 joint responses where police and DFCS staff responded together to a reported incident of child abuse.

Joint responses and partnership with law enforcement is critical to ensuring child safety during the child abuse and neglect investigatory process. DFCS is working with Administration related partners, like the Children's Advocacy Center (CAC), to actively engage multiple law enforcement agencies to strengthen these relationships. DFCS will be hosting the quarterly law enforcement meeting on May 16, 2024 to build continued collaborative partnerships between law enforcement and child welfare.

Electronic Suspected Child Abuse Reporting System (eSCARS)

On June 26, 2021, the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) released an All County Letter (ACL) 22 – 71 which described the ability for California counties to establish a local, online cross-reporting program. Several counties have engaged CDSS and some have established their own local online mandated reporting system. This reporting system is referred to as the electronic suspected child abuse reporting system (eSCARS), which allows the child welfare department, local law enforcement, and the district attorney to efficiently communicate across agencies by sharing information real-time throughout child abuse investigations. By implementing eSCARS, child welfare departments and law enforcement

agency are able to move the systems away from a “paper process” where information will be electronically shared in lieu of hard copy or via eFax. eSCARS will be a singular system to compile all information in relation to child abuse investigation and accessible to multiple agencies to support access for critical decision making – in other words, eSCARS would enable more efficient sharing of information during the course of an investigation into allegations of child abuse or neglect amongst all the entities responsible simultaneously conducting related investigations.

DFCS held an introductory meeting with the Assistant District Attorney over the Child Abuse, Endangerment and Neglect Unit of the District Attorney’s Office Family Violence Division, Technology Services and Solutions (TSS), and the Office of County Counsel to discuss SCARS and potential work plan to implement it in Santa Clara County. DFCS has engaged San Jose Police Department (SJPd), as the law enforcement agency with the highest number of cross-agency investigations with DFCS, to be a part of the eSCARS workgroup.

There are two methods to establish eSCARS, either as a standalone system or opting into a web-cloud based version. Los Angeles County, which utilizes the standalone system, has been engaged to do virtual demonstrations with the workgroup. The presentations will be broken up by the specified teams: child welfare team, law enforcement team, and technology support team. These demonstrations will allow for the specific teams to discuss eSCARS respective to their discipline and allow for in-depth conversation regarding implementation.

Conversely, both Santa Barbara County and Yolo County utilize the cloud-based eSCARS system. DFCS has reached out to both counties to discuss whether their cloud-based system could be expanded- to include Santa Clara County. DFCS is also reaching out to other Central and Northern California counties to learn more about their approach and consideration of the eSCARS system and logistics around implementation.

Next Steps

DFCS will establish a workgroup with the DA’s Office, local law enforcement agencies, and TSS to support continued conversations around the viability of eSCARS in Santa Clara County including cost, logistics, and required sharing agreements. DFCS is also coordinating technical assistance meetings with Los Angeles County’s child welfare department and engaging other California child welfare agencies that have similar models. DFCS leadership will also continue to individually engage local law enforcement agencies and participate in an upcoming Santa Clara County Police Chief’s Association Meeting to discuss above-mentioned topics including joint response and eSCARS.