

Michael Lawson
Hayward City Attorney

Mark Salinas
Mayor of Hayward

777 B Street
Hayward, CA 94541

Dear Mr. Lawson & Mr. Salinas:

I learned this morning in the Mercury News of the lawsuit you filed against the County of Alameda, Wolf Investment Co., LLC and Westcoast Children's Clinic. As the primary provider of legal representation to children in Alameda County's child welfare system, I too am concerned about the safety of all children in the county's custody. I am also concerned about a possible violation of California Welfare & Institutions Code section 827 as there is confidential information from children's juvenile court files in the city's publicly available pleadings.

I write to you today, however, because I am deeply troubled by your descriptions of some of the children who are receiving services at the Assessment Center. Language in your letters and pleadings that refer to *children* as "predators" and as "grooming and recruiting" other children and as "engaging in prostitution" and "criminal activity" reflects a profound misunderstanding of the commercial and sexual exploitation of children and youth. There is no such thing as a child prostitute. Language matters. The words you have chosen to use, which have now been shared widely throughout the media, imply that the children you describe have consented to their situation and are to blame. The words trivialize the egregious abuse they have experienced at the hands of their adult exploiters and perpetuates the narrative that children of color are to be feared. I encourage you to learn more about child sexual exploitation and be interested in coming the table as part of the solution. There are many wonderful resources available including a toolkit by the National Center for Youth Law found here:
https://youthlaw.org/sites/default/files/attachments/2022-03/NCYL_Toolkit_0809.pdf.

I hope this lawsuit presents an opportunity to reexamine when and whether we remove children from their homes in the first place and whether the system that is built to protect them in their most vulnerable moment has the resources to provide appropriate care. A child who is frequently entering the assessment center is likely to have been failed by multiple systems long before reaching this point. There are a variety of ways children in the unfortunate situation of needing temporary care could be better served. Rather than simply relocating the existing center, children might benefit from the use of multiple facilities in more home like settings in neighborhoods that are designed as living spaces in the community and not office buildings on a commercial street. The different centers could care for children of different ages at different locations. Children first entering the system could be cared for separately from those who are between placements. There are many ways to more thoughtfully serve diverse populations of children none of which are accomplished by an abrupt closure of the assessment center.

Kristin Mateer
Executive Director

Ginger Lewis Dole
Managing Attorney

Zev Weinberg
Director of Social Work

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As a major stakeholder in this system, we would also appreciate the opportunity to know about an action as significant as a lawsuit before it is in the local news. I can be reached at (510) 496-5261 or at Kristin.Mateer@ebclo.org. Thank you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Kristin Mateer". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping tail on the letter "r".

Kristin Mateer
Executive Director