

November 17, 2005

Contact: **Notice Edwards**
Chief of Staff
Office of Assemblymember Karen Bass
(916) 319-2047

Miriam Krinsky
Executive Director
Children's Law Center
(323) 980-1712

Select Committee Will Hold Hearings on California's Foster Care Challenges

LOS ANGELES/SACRAMENTO — The California Select Committee on Foster Care has scheduled its first public hearing to be held in Los Angeles on November 21. The groundbreaking Select Committee was formed by Assemblymember Karen Bass (D-Baldwin Vista) to address critical challenges and issues impacting our state's at-risk children.

Each year, close to three quarters of a million of California's children come into contact with the state's child welfare system. More than half are age five or under. Los Angeles County, alone, is home to one of the country's largest foster care system, accounting for an astounding one in ten foster children nationwide.

Assemblymember Bass underscored the need for this newly formed Select Committee: "We must work together to develop new approaches in assisting relatives who provide care for foster youth and give our teens and youth aging out of the foster care system a better start toward independent living. It is my hope the Select Committee's efforts will generate meaningful systemic reform and legislation that will bring state agencies together and improve the lives of our most vulnerable children"

"The time is ripe for change," agreed Miriam Krinsky, Executive Director of the Children's Law Center of Los Angeles, appointed counsel for approximately 25,000 foster youth in Los Angeles, and director of Home At Last – a newly launched national partnership aimed at improving outcomes for children by enhancing the dependency legal process. "With improved leadership exemplified by the work of the Select Committee and enhanced collaboration among the many agencies and parts of the system that impact the lives of youth in foster care, we can address the current "piecemeal" parenting of foster children and begin to turn the corner in crafting a brighter future for these youth."

The Select Committee will focus on key topics in need of attention, including:

- ? How to better support relatives in caring for abused and neglected children, in order to keep more fragile families intact and promote greater well being for children in foster care;
- ? How to better address the needs of teens in foster care and youth who age out of the child welfare system and seek to adjust to independent living;

- ? How to craft more sensible funding structures that enable the needs of families and children at risk to be addressed without necessitating unnecessary removal of children from the home; and
- ? How courts and agencies across the state can collaborate more effectively, jointly share relevant data, and eliminate institutional hurdles and “silos” that inhibit improved outcomes for children.

As the Select Committee proceeds along, it is expected that it will work closely with judicial leadership to examine ways to support and enhance the role of the court in the foster care system, along with other comprehensive recommendations issued by the national, nonpartisan Pew Commission on Children in Foster Care and California’s Little Hoover Commission. The Pew Commission recommendations have been endorsed by leading legal organizations including the American Bar Association and the National Association of Counsel for Children.

At the kick-off hearing on November 21, 2005 the Committee will hear from experts in the field of child welfare, including Shay Bilchik, President and CEO of the Child Welfare League of America; Hon. William A. Thorne Jr., a Judge of the Utah Court of Appeals and member of the Pew Commission on Children in Foster Care; state and national experts on financing of foster care; Hon. Michael Nash, Presiding Judge of the Los Angeles County Juvenile Court; Dr. David Sanders, Director of the Los Angeles Department of Children and Family Services; and others. The Committee also expects to receive compelling testimony from former foster youth, who will describe their personal experiences in the system and identify areas where they feel reforms are needed. The hearing will be held at the Junipero Building, 320 W. 4th Street, Los Angeles, from 1 pm to 5 pm, and is open to the press and public.

####