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## **Mental Health Summit finds system is failing Foster Youth**

*Mental health problems are associated with a lower likelihood of reunifying with birth families or adoption, longer stays in the foster care system, more moves while in care, and a high rate of entry into the delinquency system.*

**LOS ANGELES** – According to a report released today by participants in a first-ever Foster Youth Mental Health Summit, children who already have the fewest defenses are paying the price for an inadequate child welfare and mental health services system. The Summit, “Making Reform Real: Addressing the Mental Health Needs of Children in the Dependency System,” was organized by the Children’s Law Center of Los Angeles with generous funding from The California Endowment.

The report warns that failure to provide appropriate mental health services to children and youth in foster care can lead to tragedy both for individual children and for our community as a whole. “The State of California must transition the Foster Care System from fail first to help first,” observed State Senator Darrell Steinberg in the Summit keynote address.

Los Angeles is home to the largest child welfare system in the country, accounting for an astounding one in ten foster children nationwide. The invitation-only Mental Health Summit brought together mental health clinicians, social workers, foster parents, relative caregivers, advocates, community leaders, and youth to identify and develop concrete, workable solutions regarding provision of mental health services for nearly 30,000 abused and neglected children throughout Los Angeles County.

“We owe it to our most vulnerable children to act as responsible community “parents” and take action now to make these recommendations a reality,” stated Miriam Krinsky Special Director of Policy and Reform Initiatives for the Children’s Law Center. The Honorable Michael Nash, Presiding Judge of the LA County Juvenile Court agreed, “We have to re-evaluate our roles and have greater sensitivity for youth with mental health issues.”

Key recommendations in the report, being disseminated today among leaders in the child welfare and mental health systems, include ensuring timely and quality screenings and assessments, instituting early intervention and prevention programs, promoting evidence based practices, enhancing access to services, facilitating system collaboration and communication, and enhancing the voice of youth in this process. Consistent themes center on the need for better communication, collaboration, and oversight among the multiple systems charged with caring for abused and neglected children. As one former foster youth told the Summit, “I was never educated about the medication I was taking. I had no idea what it was.”

“The Summit brought together an impressive array of established and young leaders to the discussion of these critical issues, and their recommendations should be taken seriously,” said Gwen Foster, Sr. Program Officer at The California Endowment.

*For more information about the Children’s Law Center of Los Angeles and the Foster Youth Mental Health Initiative, visit [www.clcla.org](http://www.clcla.org).*

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