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Agenda Cover Memorandum

Agenda Date: May 7, 2003
To: Lane County Board of Commissioners
Department: Children and Families
Presented By: Kitty Piercy, Chair, Commission of Children and Families
Agenda Item Title: Committee Report

I. ISSUE OR PROBLEM

On February 10, 2003 the Lane County Board of County Commissioners asked the Commission of Children and Families (LCCF) to provide feedback on the options for administration of the Department of Children and Families.

II. DISCUSSION

To summarize the final outcome, the LCCF came to consensus on the need to ensure that prevention and the needs of children and families in Lane County have a strong voice in the community. Consequently, the majority opinion among Commissioners was to maintain Children and Families as a stand-alone department.

The reasons discussed were the belief that a move to a larger department might cause LCCF to get lost or sink to the bottom of a priority list, in a time when there are so many financial pressures on programs with far greater budgets than that of the LCCF. In addition, early childhood prevention programs already have a tough time getting airtime and LCCF was concerned about what would transpire if a move to another department occurred. There was also a belief that there was no compelling evidence of cost savings or efficiencies to necessitate the move, and that in fact the overhead in a larger department might even increase the costs.

The LCCF reiterated their interest in independence of thought, advisory capacity and in continuing the advocacy, education, and planning work for which the department is known. Much work has been done to build trust and infrastructure with continued efforts to build a strong partnership with community organizations. Commissioners did not want to lose these elements and felt that could happen if absorbed into a larger department. There is a firm belief that children and families must be designated a

priority in the county and that this would be exemplified by a separate department status. This being said, the LCCF continues to be committed to working intra-departmentally for efficiencies wherever possible.

Throughout the discussion there were a variety of ideas about what the commission needs to be successful. Some of the overriding themes were that the Department of Children and Families must be influential in the community and with policy-makers, it must have a strong, independent voice with the ability to create and nurture partnerships, and the ability to grow if possible.

There were a few Commissioners in support of a move to Health and Human Services, because they thought the missions were not dissimilar, and that this could be a natural home for LCCF. Moving to H&HS or County Administration were many Commissioners' second choice.

III. RECOMMENDATION

In conclusion, the LCCF's majority opinion was to maintain Children and Families as a stand-alone department. In addition the LCCF recommends that once a decision about the administration of the Department of has been made and State funding secured, that the county start the process of hiring for permanent leadership.