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OPINION: AB 1250 THREATENS ABILITY TO PROTECT AT-RISK YOUTH, FAMILIES IN CRISIS

By CHARLES C. RICH, Executive Director of David & Margaret Youth and Family Services

SATURDAY, JULY 1, 2017 - When it comes to protecting at-risk youth and families in crisis, our organization takes our responsibilities very seriously. That's why we are vehemently opposed to Assembly Bill 1250, which severely threatens the ability of organizations like ours to partner with counties to provide essential services for the most vulnerable.

The bill would place significant new restrictions on the ability of counties to contract with community-based organizations, nonprofits, local businesses and other private providers of local services. Counties contract with organizations and businesses that have the expertise, capacity or ability to deliver services more efficiently.

Founded as an orphanage over a century ago, today David & Margaret Youth and Family Services serves more than 1,700 Southern California at-risk youth and family members annually. We specialize in caring for at-risk girls ages 11-19 by providing emergency and transitional shelter care and residential treatment. We provide foster care and adoption services for children 0-18. We help treat, prevent and raise awareness of substance abuse issues, as well as the commercial sexual exploitation of children. Our extensive services for young adults transitioning out of the foster care and probations systems include housing, case management, mental health services and workforce training.

AB1250 would impose unreasonable and excessive new burdens on nonprofits and private-sector contractors for the sole purpose of discouraging public/private partnerships. AB1250 is sponsored by certain labor unions that want to force all services to be provided directly by counties so they'll be required to increase full-time staff.

But that ignores the fact that some essential services — especially those for the most vulnerable — are often delivered more effectively and at a lower cost by local nonprofit organizations and private businesses.

Across Southern California, counties contract with local organizations to provide other services including family crisis response, community clinics, substance abuse programs, clinics and public hospitals, vocational training programs, community mental health facilities, physicians and other staff in cognitive behavior programs, mental health programs and substance abuse programs, and other public safety, social services and health care.

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AB1250 puts all of these services at risk.

The onerous bureaucratic obligations placed on contractors in AB1250 create a huge disincentive for nonprofits, local businesses and CBOs to bid on any county contracts. For example, AB1250 requires contractors to disclose personal information, including compensation data, of certain officers, directors, executives or employees of a company that contracts with counties.

AB1250 also requires new auditing requirements and monthly disclosure reports at the expense of the contractors. This will put a chill on the private sector's willingness to enter into contracts with counties to provide services. This could result in unnecessary gaps and delays in service delivery which can pose detrimental outcomes for the people benefiting from these programs.

Eliminating the ability of counties to contract out will not only result in an erosion of services, but it could mean increased costs for taxpayers. That will also divert county resources away from the delivery of other services.

AB1250 will be heard July 5 in the Senate Governance and Finance Committee. Our local Sens. Ed Hernandez, D-West Covina; Robert Hertzberg, D-Van Nuys; Ricardo Lara, D-Long Beach; John Moorlach, R-Costa Mesa, and Janet Nguyen, R-Garden Grove, serve on this committee.

We urge them to protect services for our most vulnerable and reject this unnecessary, dangerous bill.

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