

Agreement in Katie A. will provide mental health services to California children in, or at risk of entering, nation's largest child welfare system

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Los Angeles, CA - Federal District Court Judge A. Howard Matz today approved a landmark agreement between advocates and the state of California that will provide intensive home- and community-based mental health services for children in foster care or at risk of removal from their families. The agreement in the class-action suit Katie A. v. Bonta comes nine years after the case was first filed.

Under the ground-breaking settlement, California will make two types of mental health services, "Intensive Home-Based Services" and "Intensive Care Coordination," available to certain children under Medicaid. The state will also determine what parts of "Therapeutic Foster Care" services are covered under Medicaid and provide that service to certain class members.

"These services will ensure that thousands of Medicaid-eligible children obtain access to the mental health services they need to live in a family and succeed in school and later life," said Robert Newman, attorney for the plaintiffs, from the Western Center for Law and Poverty.

The settlement also requires California to improve its system of care for providing mental health services to foster youth by coordinating decision-making among state and local agencies, improving guidance to mental health care providers, and developing a consistent team approach to meeting the needs of eligible children and youth and their families.

"This agreement will improve children's access to mental health care and lower government costs. But, the hard work of doing what is promised in the Agreement remains," stated Patrick Gardner, an attorney with the National Center for Youth Law.

Implementation of the Agreement must be achieved within 3 years, a relatively short period of time for such a large statewide system. "We commend the state for agreeing to an accelerated schedule for getting these services in place," said Kimberly Lewis, an attorney with the National Health Law Program. "We will be doing what we can to ensure that the state is successful in meeting its deadlines."

Judge Matz also noted the aggressive timetable, and made a commitment to assure that deadlines would be met "without any extension." The first milestone in the Agreement is completion of an implementation plan within 6 months.

"The settlement brings California into line with modern mental health practice," stated Ira Burnim, of the Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law. "We are delighted to see the process begin that will put into place a system that will address the mental health needs of thousands of California's most vulnerable children."

The children in the plaintiff class are represented by the Western Center on Law and Poverty, the National Center for Youth Law, Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law, Disability Rights California, the American Civil Liberties Union of Southern California, and the National Health Law Program.

The Settlement Agreement can be found [HERE](#) .

Judge Matz's Stipulated Judgment Order can be found [HERE](#) .

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Founded in 1969, the National Health Law Program works with and on behalf of limited-income people, people with disabilities, and children to improve their access to quality health care and to enforce their legal rights to health. NHeLP works with courts, government agencies, and Congress to ensure quality health care for the most vulnerable members of our society.