



MATERNAL AND CHILD HEALTH ACCESS

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January 12, 2015

Board of Supervisors
Hall of Administration, Los Angeles, California

Sent by e-mail

Honorable Supervisors:

I write as a public health professional in the Los Angeles County for the last 30 years, and a proud graduate of the UCLA, now Fielding, School of Public Health.

It is with great dismay that our organization, Maternal and Child Health Access (MCHA) first heard of a new (yet old) proposal to merge Los Angeles County's Department of Public Health yet again with our Department of Health Services.

I am dismayed for several reasons, not the least of which is that I am reading about this proposal in the *Los Angeles Times* as a nearly "done deal", without the least regard for transparency among county citizens or people working in public health. Maternal and Child Health Access respectfully requests some opportunity for public input. Opportunity for feedback on the written proposal and/or public forums in more than one area and language (perhaps in each Supervisorial District) are but two of the ways this input could be sought.

Secondly, again with the utmost respect for your offices, Board members do not seem to have been well-informed about the distinction between public health and health care. Public Health is decidedly NOT the provision of health care to the poor or indigent, not even the provision of preventive health care, a misconception often reinforced in the media. Public Health, as defined by the World Health Organization, emphases added, is the following:

Public health refers to all organized measures (whether public or private) to prevent disease, promote health, and prolong life among the population as a whole. Its activities aim to provide conditions in which people can be healthy and focus on entire populations, not on individual patients or diseases. Thus, public health is concerned with the total system and not only the eradication of a particular disease.

It is unfortunate that Los Angeles County would consider moving backwards in the protection of the public's health, as more and more efforts are underway to shift our landscape and environment to encourage healthy behaviors. These are efforts that LA County DPH has championed in recent grant-funded initiatives, such as thorough monitoring of our climate, safe and walkable/rideable streets, and provision of adequate places to buy fresh produce.

Third, we've been through this exercise before in Los Angeles County. Below is a quote from the documents attached from 2006, p. 21 of 27, providing reasons to separate the departments:

.... Public Health and Personal Health have different missions. Public Health's mission is to protect and improve the health of all 10 million Los Angeles County residents, while Personal Health's mission is to provide medical care for the medically indigent. This difference, and the fact that Public Health accounts for approximately 19 percent of the DHS budget, complicates discussions of DHS priorities and increases the risk that the Public Health mission will not receive sufficient attention, despite growing threats of epidemics, bioterrorism and burdens of chronic disease in our County.

Maternal and Child Health Access respectfully asks you not to give any sort of preliminary approval to the proposal to once again merge the departments of Public Health and Health Services until more scrutiny and study can be made of the proposal, including its fiscal and health impacts, and public input can be sought.

Thank you for your attention to our concerns.

Sincerely,



Lynn Kersey, MA, MPH, CLE
Executive Director

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