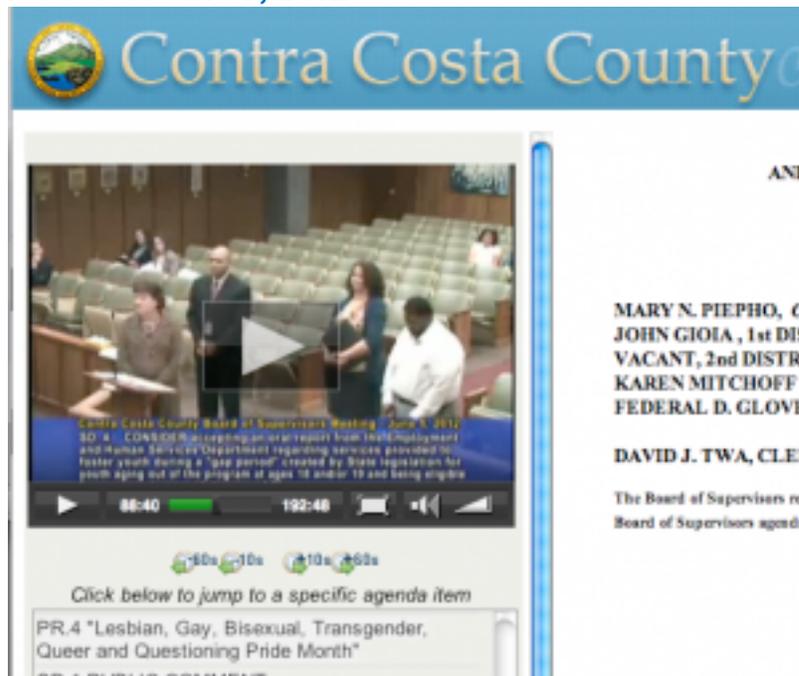


# CoCo County Sets Record Straight on Bubble Foster Youth

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The Board of Supervisors re  
Board of Supervisors agenda

Foster care staff address Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors on June 5th.

By Tasion Kwamilele & Daniel Heimpel

Responding to a slew of media reports surrounding Contra Costa County's policy of cutting off foster care for youth at age 19, District 4 Supervisor Karen Mitchoff requested an oral report at the Contra Costa County's Board of Supervisors [meeting](#) this week

"There have been two negative stories in our local paper about this, and I wanted the real story, or more fleshing of facts shall we say, out in the public," Mitchoff said during Tuesday's hearing in Martinez, CA.

In an [earlier story published](#) in *The Chronicle of Social Change* and in an [op-ed](#) that [Supervisor Federal Glover](#) drafted for *The Contra Costa Times*, the board of supervisors has maintained that the county's [Independent Living Skills Program](#) (ILSP) is doing an exemplary job of providing services to foster youth as they transition into adulthood.

“Since the passage of the [John Chaffee Act](#) [which offered federal funds for transition age foster youth] in 1999, Contra Costa County Children and Family Services has been creatively, legislatively and aggressively providing services to youth transitioning out of the foster care system,” said ILSP Coordinator Don Graves during the hearing.

While the ILSP program helps foster youth develop transitional plans, gives financial stipends, offers life skills workshops and points youth to housing options, cutting off foster care inevitably creates instability for youth as they try and navigate the world as adults.

In 2010, California took a substantive step towards forestalling the negative outcomes that often befall foster youth as they transition into adulthood by passing landmark [legislation extending foster care](#) services. But in the fraught negotiations to get the bill (AB 12) through, legislators compromised and phased the implementation of the law in to save money, creating a situation wherein state funding dries up for youth turning 19 in 2012.

[2,166 foster youth](#) will turn (or have already) 19 this year, forcing cash-strapped counties scrambling to find ways to fill the funding gap the state law created. Some counties like Los Angeles, San Francisco and San Mateo have taken on the financial burden on themselves. While others, like Contra Costa, have not.

Scrutiny around Contra Costa County’s response to the funding “bubble” started when this news source [first reported](#) on the case of foster youth David Colby who feared being pushed out of the foster care system on his 19th birthday in May. Colby’s case encapsulated this bitter sweet moment in the evolution in California’s foster care policy, wherein a young person’s birthday was the deciding factor in whether or not they received the services the state had promised would help them successfully transition into adulthood.

A barrage of news coverage stemming from Colby’s experience in outlets including [The San Francisco Chronicle](#), [The Contra Costa Times](#), [KGO Radio News](#) and [KPIX News](#) ensued, creating new pressure on the State Assembly to pass mop up legislation that would eliminate the funding bubble. On May 30th, this legislation ([AB 1712](#)) did [pass unanimously](#) on the Assembly floor and now awaits action in the State Senate.

“We recognize that there are state mandates without state funding in play, and encourage the state to consider dedicated funding to support the extension of foster care,” said a handful of Contra Costa County Supervisors through a statement given to *The Chronicle*. “However, children who enter our system are ours until they are successfully launched; that’s the commitment our child welfare workers show with each and every case, no matter how difficult the circumstances.”

For the county’s 43 “bubble kids,” this commitment is embodied by the ILSP program run by 20-year child welfare veteran Don Graves.

Under Graves' watch, Contra Costa County's ILSP moved into a 10,000 square foot facility in 2001, making it a one-stop shop for foster youth in need of services. From a state of the art kitchen used to provide basic cooking classes to a computer lab housing more than thirty computers for the kids to use to find employment. The facility also has a wardrobe closet filled with new and used clothes and shoes that are readily available to youth as well as a shower and hygiene closet.

ILSP works with the Transitional Housing Program (THP Plus) to help foster youth who have aged out find housing. The program also uses a Host-Home model of housing where families are able to rent out space in their homes to emancipated foster youth.

While the state contemplates filling in the funding bubble, Graves and the ILSP program are left trying to live up to its intent without an influx of cash to do so.

"We have focused on fund-raising to help augment the dwindling dollars allocated to ILSP," said Graves, adding that excursions and trips have already been limited. "We created a non-profit umbrella account with our volunteer and emergency services where we are able to receive cash donations from the community."

A significant amount of time is put into identifying funding sources and applying for various grants to help fund ILSP services. Contra Costa County's ILSP received \$9,000 for two year's to support the upkeep of the facilities food pantry and recently received a \$15,000 grant from Orinda's Women Club was given to support extended care services.

Graves, who sees the extension of foster care as the realization of years of advocacy, is undaunted.

"I believe I've been called to do this work," he said. "We have a moral obligation to look after these young adults."

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#### **ONE THOUGHT ON "COCO COUNTY SETS RECORD STRAIGHT ON BUBBLE FOSTER YOUTH"**

- . Rakennya on [June 8, 2012 at 4:46 am](#) said: This is an amazing program and it really does make a difference in the lives of youth who grew up in the system such as myself. As youth we can't control being in the system but with the help of this program we can control how it effects the rest of our lives and because of this program and Don Graves I am a college graduate, business owner, and a productive member of society despite the odds and stereo types. I am who I am today because this program. Reply ↓