

**HEALTH COMMISSION
RESOLUTION NO. 14-13**

**Supporting the Availability of Health Care Services to Meet the Needs of Unaccompanied Immigrant
Central American Youth**

WHEREAS, In recent months an unprecedented number of children have fled their home countries in Central America to seek refuge in the United States; and

WHEREAS, Data collected by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) shows that since October 2013, approximately 47,017 Central American children have fled from their home countries into the United States, which represents a substantial increase from prior years; and

WHEREAS, It is estimated that the number of children entering the United States in fiscal year 2014 will exceed 60,000, with an average of 120-400 children crossing the border each day; and

WHEREAS, From January to July 2014, the Department of Health and Human Services reported that 185 unaccompanied youth were released to relatives and host families in San Francisco, with many more likely arriving without being processed by DHHS; and

WHEREAS, As many as 500 unaccompanied youth may arrive in San Francisco by the end of the year; and

WHEREAS, During their dangerous journey to the United States, many children become victims of trafficking, sexual abuse and violence; and

WHEREAS, The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) interviewed more than 400 unaccompanied youth and the youth stated that extreme poverty, unemployment, trauma and the lack of state protection from gang violence and drug-traffickers were the main reasons for fleeing their home countries; and

WHEREAS, Once apprehended by the U.S. Customs and Border Patrol, many of these children have been placed in detention facilities and processing centers where they have been subjected to difficult living conditions; and

WHEREAS, The United States Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR), the agency responsible for the care and well-being of unaccompanied immigrant children, has identified the need for children to receive culturally competent and trauma-informed medical and social work services for life-skills readiness and to ease their social integration process; additionally, ORR cited the need for legal services to ensure that every child has access to counsel and receives due process; and

WHEREAS, The Obama Administration and DHHS are in communication with major cities, including San Francisco, to identify needed resources to help address this escalating international humanitarian crisis; and

WHEREAS, The San Francisco Bay Area is home to a large and vibrant Central American community and has a longstanding history of supporting the advancement of human rights throughout Central America,

evidenced by the important role it played during the Sanctuary Movement of the 1980's when San Francisco provided a safe-haven for Central American refugees fleeing civil conflict; and

WHEREAS, Since the passage of the Sanctuary Ordinance in 1989, San Francisco has held the distinction of being a "Sanctuary City," providing equal access to public services and civil protections and providing compassionate, culturally appropriate supports and services to the most vulnerable among us, regardless of their immigration status; and

WHEREAS, This year the San Francisco Board of Supervisors unanimously approved a resolution declaring San Francisco's commitment to aiding in the humanitarian relief effort by leveraging city resources toward addressing the needs of unaccompanied immigrant children coming to San Francisco; and

WHEREAS, Given the arduous nature of their journey, unaccompanied immigrant children may have significant health and mental health care needs; and

WHEREAS, The San Francisco Department of Public Health (SFDPH) is the City's health care safety net with a long history of providing linguistically and culturally appropriate services to immigrant youth and families in San Francisco; and

WHEREAS, SFDPH's San Francisco Health Network already provides a complete range of health care services that are available to individuals of all ages, regardless of immigration status, including primary care and specialty care, including mental health services, as well as hospital and emergency services; and

WHEREAS, These services are also available through the Healthy Kids Program, which provides health insurance for low-income children, and through Healthy San Francisco, which provides comprehensive health care for low-income uninsured individuals over age 18; and

WHEREAS, SFDPH is already caring for many of these youth in its pediatric and community-based primary care clinics; and

WHEREAS, One of the most common pathways to mental health services for unaccompanied youth is through the schools and through their primary care providers; and

WHEREAS, SFDPH provides specialized mental health services for children and adolescents both on campus at several public schools in San Francisco and also by referral from primary care clinics, behavioral health clinics through contracted community-based organizations, and through ongoing collaborations with the school district; and

WHEREAS, SFDPH is also working to provide mental health training to community organizations that are working with these youth, as many have been through traumatic events; and

WHEREAS, SFDPH is taking the lead in developing a home visiting template so that interdisciplinary and interdepartmental service providers can utilize some standardized questions to assess risk, trauma, health, wellness and the safety of the home environment; now

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, That the San Francisco Health Commission is committed to assisting in the humanitarian relief effort by supporting the San Francisco Department of Public Health's ongoing efforts

to extend critical health care programs and services to unaccompanied immigrant children in San Francisco.

I hereby certify that the San Francisco Health Commission at its meeting on September 2nd, 2014 adopted the foregoing resolution.

Mark Morewitz
Health Commission Secretary