

VANESSA FUCHS
CHIEF PROBATION OFFICER

Sonoma County Probation Department

Protocol for Foster Youth Missing from Care

I. Purpose

This protocol establishes procedures for responding to, reporting, and managing **foster youth under the supervision of the Sonoma County Probation Department who are missing from care**, in compliance with Welfare and Institutions Code §16501.35, AB 2108, and applicable All County Letters (ACL 16-15 and ACL 25-67).

This protocol applies to **all probation-supervised foster youth**, including **dual status youth**, who are absent without authorization from placement.

II. Definitions

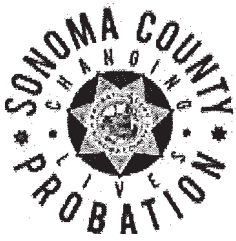
- **Foster Youth Missing from Care:** A probation-supervised foster youth whose whereabouts are unknown and who is absent without authorization from placement.
 - **AWOL:** A foster youth who leaves placement without permission or fails to return as required.
 - **At-Risk Foster Youth:** Foster youth who may be vulnerable due to age, prior AWOL history, risk of commercial sexual exploitation (CSEC), mental health needs, or medical concerns.
-

III. Immediate Response Requirements

Upon notification that a **foster youth is missing from care**, probation staff shall act expeditiously, but no later than 24 hours:

A. Notification to Law Enforcement

Probation officers supervising foster youth shall report missing youth-particularly those who have been or are at risk for sexual exploitation-to the law enforcement agency with jurisdiction. Law enforcement shall enter the youth into the **National Crime Information Center (NCIC)** system.



VANESSA FUCHS
CHIEF PROBATION OFFICER

B. NCMEC Reporting

The probation officer shall report the foster youth to the **National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC)** via telephone (1-800-THE-LOST) or through the online reporting portal.

C. Warrant and Notifications

The supervision officer shall:

- Request an arrest warrant, when appropriate
- Notify relevant parties, including:
 - Parent(s)/legal guardian(s)
 - Caregiver/placement provider
 - Attorney of record
 - Tribal representatives (if applicable)
 - Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA), if assigned

IV. Documentation Requirements

A. Foster Youth / Dual Status Youth

Officers shall document in **CWS/CMS**:

- Timeframe for reporting the foster youth missing
- Ongoing efforts to locate the foster youth (at minimum monthly)
- Primary factors contributing to the foster youth being absent from care

B. CSEC Documentation

When applicable, documentation shall also be entered in the case chronological record under the designation of **CSEC Chrono**.



VANESSA FUCHS
CHIEF PROBATION OFFICER

V. Ongoing Search Efforts

Probation officers shall make diligent, ongoing efforts to locate the **foster youth missing from care**, including but not limited to:

- i. Contacting individuals significant to the foster youth
- ii. Requesting caregivers and/or parents to assist and report information
- iii. Conducting in-person checks at known or likely locations
- iv. Requesting law enforcement welfare checks, when appropriate
- v. Following up on all leads regarding the foster youth's whereabouts
- vi. Consulting with internal Runaway/Missing Children Liaisons
- vii. Reviewing social media and public databases, including NCMEC resources

All efforts shall be clearly documented.

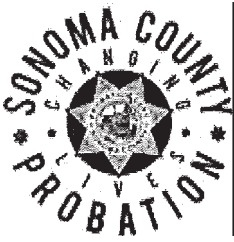
VI. Commercial Sexual Exploitation {CSEC} Response

If the **foster youth** is identified as a victim or at risk of commercial sexual exploitation:

- The probation officer shall assess the foster youth's experiences while absent
 - Appropriate services shall be arranged, including:
 - Medical care
 - Mental health services
 - Law enforcement involvement, as needed
 - The assigned officer shall convene a **Child and Family Team (CFT)** meeting when applicable
 - The officer shall participate in multidisciplinary team (MDT) meetings in alignment with Sonoma County's CSEC Plan
-

VII. Supervisor Oversight

Supervisors shall:



VANESSA FUCHS
CHIEF PROBATION OFFICER

- Review missing-from-care incidents involving foster youth within 24 hours
 - Ensure compliance with reporting, documentation, and search efforts
 - Provide guidance regarding escalation and safety planning
-

VIII. Recovery Procedures

When the **foster youth is located**:

A. Safety Assessment

- Assess immediate safety, including need for medical or mental health care

B. Removal from Missing Status

- Ensure prompt removal from NCIC/CLETS systems

C. Debriefing

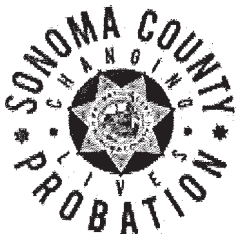
- Conduct a debrief to assess:
 - Circumstances of absence
 - Exposure to exploitation or victimization
 - Ongoing safety risks

D. Case Planning

- Update case plan to address identified needs and reduce risk of recurrence
-

IX. Dual Status Youth

This protocol applies to **dual status youth who are dependents of the court and placed in foster care**. In such cases, the designated lead agency shall maintain primary responsibility for compliance; however, Sonoma County Probation shall collaborate and ensure all required actions are completed.



VANESSA FUCHS
CHIEF PROBATION OFFICER

X. Data Tracking and Continuous Improvement

The department shall track and review incidents of **foster youth missing from care** to identify trends, improve interventions, and ensure compliance with state mandates.

XI. Training

All probation staff shall receive training on:

- Foster youth missing-from-care protocols
- Trauma-informed practices
- Commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC)