

From: [Board Of Supervisors](#)
To: [Jesseka Rodriguez](#)
Subject: FW: Plea for Immediate Mental Health Reform for Foster Youth
Date: Monday, March 24, 2025 9:40:16 AM

From: Talya Lutzker [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, March 24, 2025 8:22 AM
To: Board Of Supervisors <boardofsupervisors@santacruzcountyca.gov>; melissa schilling [REDACTED]
Cc: Second District <Second.District@santacruzcountyca.gov>; Kimberly De Serpa <Kimberly.DeSerpa@santacruzcountyca.gov>
Subject: Re: Plea for Immediate Mental Health Reform for Foster Youth

******CAUTION:**This is an EXTERNAL email. Exercise caution. DO NOT open attachments or click links from unknown senders or unexpected email.****

Hi there.

Melissa Schilling is a dear friend and yoga student of mine. I've known Melissa for 15 years - when she was running Project Hope Art and before she adopted [REDACTED].

What I can say about Melissa is that she is amongst the kindest, most caring, creative, fun-loving, and dedicated women I've ever known. She has shown complete and total dedication to [REDACTED] wellbeing for as long as I've known him. She is known (personally and professionally) as someone who goes above and beyond to be an incredibly energetic, positive, and empathetic human being.

I met [REDACTED] when Melissa first brought him home with her from Haiti and have spent time with him a handful of times - in various situations. He once came to my yoga class (where he chose to stretch, rest, and read), he helped call out bingo numbers when Melissa hosted a bingo night in the spring of 2024, he came to one of my dog's birthday parties, and I've seen him and Melissa out and about at the beach and numerous Santa Cruz locations.

It has always struck me that [REDACTED] won the lottery by gaining Melissa as his primary caregiver and legal guardian - emotionally, mentally, and physically. I don't know how anyone could ask for someone more honest, stable, present, generous, and authentically wanting the best for him.

That being said, the trauma [REDACTED] has endured is beyond anyone's comprehension and trauma has a life of its own. Ask any experienced therapist and they'll tell you that trauma often spirals into mental illness and behavioral divergence.

[REDACTED] had an extremely traumatic early life (survived a natural disaster with no surviving parents, unimaginable childhood trauma and complex PTSD, a chronic and life-threatening illness that requires daily attention) and the consequences of that are still yet to be known and

felt. Because they are so well written, I'm going to echo some words you've already heard - written by Elizabeth Marley, an instructor at UCD and former volunteer of Project Hope Art. I know her words to be true from my many interactions with [REDACTED] and Melissa over the years.

"I had the pleasure of meeting sweet [REDACTED] back when he was around eight years old. At that time, he and Melissa were working on making sure he took his medicine (an ongoing battle) and helping him know he didn't have to hide food. He had access to a full pantry, fridge, and culturally relevant dishes that reminded him of his Haitian heritage on a regular basis. I remember him being timid in his speech as he was still learning English.

I also remember him being a respectful, quiet, but very active kid. Melissa made sure to nurture those activities that brought him joy: sailing classes, surfing classes, etc. And I could tell he LOVED pretty much anything in the water. Over the years, I have observed [REDACTED] to be a fun-loving, good-hearted kid that loves and respects his family and friends. To an outsider, [REDACTED] had everything he could possibly want—cool clothes, fast bike, good school, access to extracurricular activities, his own snack cabinet, cutting edge technology, even his own social media account to share his love for his dogs and travel in his posts.

What isn't seen is the deep childhood trauma he endured before Melissa had legal guardianship, the weight of being born with a serious and still stigmatized disease (HIV-1), severe ADHD, uncontrollable kleptomania, and a learning disability due to his entering school and learning the English language later than many kids his age. This isn't a "Oh, he's just a teenage boy acting out" kind of thing. He needs substantial help."

As someone who comes from a traumatic background myself, an escalation of behavioral issues, spiral unraveling, and erratic behavior is common, even normal. But it needs to be responded to with a level of professional help that Melissa has done everything in her power to secure. [REDACTED] needs more. [REDACTED] needs more mental help than he's received - from professionals in the field of trauma, facing grief, and trauma recovery.

Please approve the resources necessary to get [REDACTED] the help and professional health care attention that he needs.

Melissa has always provided and prioritized guidance, care, and support for [REDACTED]. She has made sure he was in the right schools, made sure he had the right medication, has been impeccable in her communication with him, and has gone above and beyond to teach him life skills, communication skills, and routine and organization.

"Even when he was able to travel to Haiti to spend time with his relatives in last ditch efforts to help him connect to his roots and gain a sense of belonging, specifically with his Aunt that became known and more available over more recent years, Melissa made sure he had full supply of medicine, a trusted adult to backup on communication via mobile and email, and a way to Zoom call often. Melissa is not negligent. She has never abandoned [REDACTED]" And I can say with certainty that she never will. But raising him into the amazing adult he 100% has the capacity to be is something she cannot do alone.

This is a call for help. Thank you.

Talya Lutzker, CAP, CMT

Santa Cruz, CA

Two Hands Together.
LOVE, Talya

Talya Lutzker
CEO, Ayurveda Every Day With Talya
Certified Ayurvedic Practitioner, Health and Lifestyle Expert,
Author, Yoga Teacher

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[Click here to visit my website.](#)

On Monday, March 24, 2025 at 08:01:43 AM PDT, melissa schilling [REDACTED] wrote:

Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors
701 Ocean Street, Room 500
Santa Cruz, CA 95060

Subject: Plea for Immediate Mental Health Reform for Foster Youth

Dear Members of the Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors,

I am writing as a mother who is exhausted, heartbroken, and desperate for real change in how this county handles mental and behavioral health care—especially for foster youth. My son, [REDACTED], has endured unimaginable struggles under the care of Santa Cruz County's mental health system, and despite my repeated attempts to get him the help he so desperately needs, he continues to fall through the cracks.

In just the past six months, my son has been placed on two separate 5150 psychiatric holds. He is not just another case file—he is a child, my child, who has suffered due to inadequate oversight, poor coordination between agencies, and outright neglect. I have tried everything—emails, calls, letters—to get someone, anyone, in the system to act before it's too late.

Where the System Has Failed My Son:

1. Psychiatric Negligence and Poor Decision-Making:

- Dr. Namjas Enman, the psychiatrist assigned to oversee my son's care, abruptly discontinued his psychotropic medications without conducting an in-person evaluation or consulting with the doctors who originally prescribed them. This decision was made without regard for his complex mental health history, leading to severe deterioration in his behavior and well-being.
- Since losing his medication, my son has spiraled into crisis after crisis, culminating in multiple psychiatric hospitalizations. These could have been prevented had his care been handled with the attention and responsibility it requires.

2. A Broken Crisis Response System:

- Instead of receiving the structured, trauma-informed care he requires, law enforcement has been called repeatedly to handle my son's escalating mental health episodes. Police officers are not mental health professionals, and their involvement only exacerbates his distress.
- The county has failed to provide real crisis stabilization support. Each time he is placed on a 5150 hold, he is discharged back into the same broken system that failed him in the first place. This cycle cannot continue.

3. Lack of Leadership and Accountability in Social Services:

- Despite overwhelming evidence of my son's complex needs—including a documented history of early childhood trauma—Santa Cruz County Social Services has failed to act. Director Randy Morris has ignored my repeated requests for intervention, crisis planning, or even basic communication.
- Alameda County, when briefly involved in this case, immediately recognized his condition and provided a level of care and attention that Santa Cruz County has refused to offer. Why is it that another county can see the urgency of my son's needs, yet Santa Cruz continues to turn away?

4. Judicial Failures That Allow This Neglect to Continue:

- Judge Erika Ziegenhorn has sided time and time again with Social Services, despite clear evidence that my son is not receiving proper care. Instead of demanding accountability from these agencies, she has allowed them to operate with little oversight, leaving children like mine to suffer.

What Needs to Happen Now:

This is not just about my son—this is about every foster youth in Santa Cruz County who is being let down by a system that should be protecting them. I am pleading with you to take immediate steps to fix this crisis:

1. **Investigate the failures of Santa Cruz County Mental and Behavioral Health Services** and hold accountable those responsible for the decisions that have led to repeated psychiatric crises.
2. **Immediately transfer my son's case to a county with proven trauma-informed care**, such as Alameda or Santa Clara, where he has already received better support than he ever has in Santa Cruz.
3. **Hold Randy Morris, Paul Vitali, Joanna Moody, Emily Simoni, Mary Ellen Olson, Laura Hyams, Alli Rainey and Della Wright accountable** for their roles in allowing this neglect to continue.
4. **Establish a better crisis response system** so that foster youth experiencing psychiatric emergencies are met with trained mental health professionals, not just law enforcement.
5. **Mandate court-ordered psychological evaluations** for foster youth in crisis to ensure they receive the appropriate care and interventions without bureaucratic delays.

I am not writing this letter as a lawyer or a politician. I am writing this as a mother who is watching her child suffer while the people in charge do nothing. You have the power to change this. Please, act now before another child falls through the cracks.

I appreciate your time and expect a response outlining the actions you will take to address this crisis.

Sincerely,

Melissa Schilling



Follow-Up Questions for CPS

photo



Together in Education

██████████ She/Her, Melissa Schilling, M.S., AET

Cabrillo College | Climate Resilience

[Education Therapist | Special Education](#)

██████████ | What are you reading? I'm reading:

Tending the Wild by *Kat Anderson*



Land Acknowledgement:

"The land on which we gather is the unceded territory of the Awaswas-speaking Uypi Tribe. Today there are no known survivors of the Awaswas Nation. The Amah Mutsun Tribal Band, comprised of the descendants of indigenous people taken to missions Santa Cruz and San Juan Bautista during Spanish colonization of the Central Coast, is today working hard to restore traditional stewardship practices on these lands to honor the Awaswas and heal from historical trauma."

Amah Mutsun (Aaa-Ma) (Moot-sun)

Uypi (You-P)

Awaswas (Aaa-Was-Was)

From: [Board Of Supervisors](#)
To: [Jesseka Rodriguez](#)
Subject: FW: Plea for Immediate Mental Health Reform for Foster Youth
Date: Wednesday, March 26, 2025 3:08:38 PM
Attachments: [Roobens & Melissa - Complaint Morris Board of Supervisors.pdf](#)

From: Talya Lutzker [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, March 25, 2025 5:12 PM
To: Board Of Supervisors <boardofsupervisors@santacruzcountyca.gov>; melissa schilling [REDACTED] >
Cc: Second District <Second.District@santacruzcountyca.gov>; Kimberly De Serpa <Kimberly.DeSerpa@santacruzcountyca.gov>
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Also... are you aware of the blatant lack of necessary care, mental/emotional health treatment, and attention that [REDACTED] [REDACTED] has received from Santa Cruz County? Specifically under the leadership of Randy Morris.

This is an outrage and I'm honestly appalled that Santa Cruz would let a valuable youth such as [REDACTED] slip through the cracks of adequate care so recklessly.

I second Melissa Schilling's demands in the letter attached.
Thank you.

Two Hands Together.

LOVE, Talya

Talya Lutzker
CEO, Ayurveda Every Day With Talya
Certified Ayurvedic Practitioner, Health and Lifestyle Expert,
Author, Yoga Teacher

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On Monday, March 24, 2025 at 08:21:34 AM PDT, Talya Lutzker <[REDACTED]> wrote:

Hi there.

Melissa Schilling is a dear friend and yoga student of mine. I've known Melissa for 15 years - when she was running Project Hope Art and before she adopted [REDACTED].

What I can say about Melissa is that she is amongst the kindest, most caring, creative, fun-loving, and dedicated women I've ever known. She has shown complete and total dedication to [REDACTED] wellbeing for as long as I've known him. She is known (personally and professionally) as someone who goes above and beyond to be an incredibly energetic, positive, and empathetic human being.

I met [REDACTED] when Melissa first brought him home with her from Haiti and have spent time with him a handful of times - in various situations. He once came to my yoga class (where he chose to stretch, rest, and read), he helped call out bingo numbers when Melissa hosted a bingo night in the spring of 2024, he came to one of my dog's birthday parties, and I've seen him and Melissa out and about at the beach and numerous Santa Cruz locations.

It has always struck me that [REDACTED] won the lottery by gaining Melissa as his primary caregiver and legal guardian - emotionally, mentally, and physically. I don't know how anyone could ask for someone more honest, stable, present, generous, and authentically wanting the best for him.

That being said, the trauma [REDACTED] has endured is beyond anyone's comprehension and trauma has a life of its own. Ask any experienced therapist and they'll tell you that trauma often spirals into mental illness and behavioral divergence.

[REDACTED] had an extremely traumatic early life (survived a natural disaster with no surviving parents, unimaginable childhood trauma and complex PTSD, a chronic and life-threatening illness that requires daily attention) and the consequences of that are still yet to be known and felt. Because they are so well written, I'm going to echo some words you've already heard - written by Elizabeth Marley, an instructor at UCD and former volunteer of Project Hope Art. I know her words to be true from my many interactions with [REDACTED] and Melissa over the years.

"I had the pleasure of meeting sweet [REDACTED] back when he was around eight years old. At that time, he and Melissa were working on making sure he took his medicine (an ongoing battle) and helping him know he didn't have to hide food. He had access to a full pantry, fridge, and culturally relevant dishes that reminded him of his Haitian heritage on a regular basis. I remember him being timid in his speech as he was still learning English.

I also remember him being a respectful, quiet, but very active kid. Melissa made sure to nurture those activities that brought him joy: sailing classes, surfing classes, etc. And I could tell he LOVED pretty much anything in the water. Over the years, I have observed [REDACTED] to be a fun-loving, good-hearted kid that loves and respects his family and friends. To an outsider, [REDACTED] had everything he could possibly want—cool clothes, fast bike, good school, access to extracurricular activities, his own snack cabinet, cutting edge technology, even his own social media account to share his love for his dogs and travel in his posts.

What isn't seen is the deep childhood trauma he endured before Melissa had legal guardianship, the weight of being born with a serious and still stigmatized disease (HIV-1), severe ADHD, uncontrollable kleptomania, and a learning disability due to his entering school and learning the English language later than many kids his age. This isn't a "Oh, he's just a teenage boy acting out" kind of thing. He needs substantial help."

As someone who comes from a traumatic background myself, an escalation of behavioral issues, spiral unraveling, and erratic behavior is common, even normal. But it needs to be responded to with a level of professional help that Melissa has done everything in her power to secure. ██████ needs more. ██████ needs more mental help than he's received - from professionals in the field of trauma, facing grief, and trauma recovery.

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Santa Cruz, CA

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701 Ocean Street, Room 500
Santa Cruz, CA 95060

Subject: Plea for Immediate Mental Health Reform for Foster Youth

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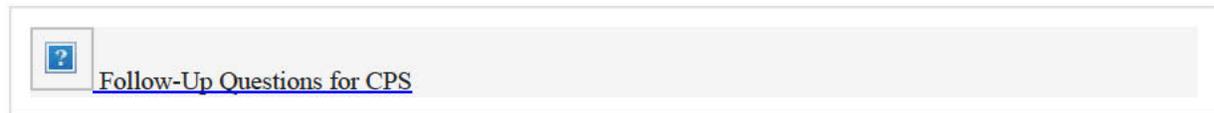
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I am not writing this letter as a lawyer or a politician. I am writing this as a mother who is watching her child suffer while the people in charge do nothing. You have the power to change this. Please, act now before another child falls through the cracks.

I appreciate your time and expect a response outlining the actions you will take to address this crisis.

Sincerely,

Melissa Schilling



Together in Education

██████████ | She/Her, Melissa Schilling, M.S., AET

Cabrillo College | Climate Resilience

[Education Therapist](#) | [Special Education](#)

██████████ | What are you reading? I'm reading:

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Land Acknowledgement:

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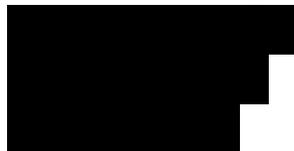
Amah Mutsun (Aaa-Ma) (Moot-sun)

Uypi (You-P)

Awaswas (Aaa-Was-Was)

March 04, 2025

Melissa Schilling



Formal Complaint Against Santa Cruz County Social Services Director Randy Morris

I am writing to formally complain about the conduct of Randy Morris, Director of Santa Cruz County Social Services, regarding his repeated failure to mediate, communicate, respond, intervene, or effect any meaningful change in a critical mental health case involving my family. From August 2024 through March 2025, as this case has escalated and ultimately imploded, Mr. Morris has never once reached out with compassion, support, or service—despite bi-monthly email correspondence, court filings, and letters to social services employees requesting assistance.

Santa Cruz County Social Services has consistently failed to address the urgent and complex needs of my son, [REDACTED], a foster youth with a well-documented history of early childhood trauma, cognitive impairments, and severe mental health challenges. Despite extensive documentation, including neuropsychological assessments confirming his vulnerabilities, Santa Cruz County Social Services has not implemented appropriate interventions.

Key failures under Mr. Morris' leadership include:

1. Negligent Mental Health Oversight

- Despite clear evidence of Reactive Attachment Disorder, Santa Cruz County Social Services failed to conduct a thorough psychological assessment or ensure trauma-informed care.
- Alameda County social workers, who reviewed this case, immediately recognized the signs of Reactive Attachment Disorder and provided empathy, support, and resources—despite this case not being in their

jurisdiction. In contrast, Santa Cruz County Social Services has remained indifferent and unresponsive.

2. Failure to Provide Crisis Intervention

- [REDACTED] has been placed on two psychiatric holds (5150 and 5185) due to escalating mental health crises. Law enforcement has repeatedly had to intervene due to his destructive behaviors, including setting fires and physically damaging property.
- Santa Cruz County Social Services has not provided any crisis stabilization, despite these repeated incidents.

3. Failure to Communicate and Coordinate Care

- A San Rafael Police officer reported that Santa Cruz County Social Services is unresponsive during crises. When law enforcement is called to [REDACTED] facility, no authorized representative is available to communicate with them.
- The officer stated that I am the only consistent point of contact through 18 visits to the facility, further proving the county's complete lack of oversight.

4. Failure to Ensure Proper Medical Treatment

- Dr. Namjas Enman, a physician overseeing my son's psychiatric care, discontinued his psychotropic medications without in-person evaluation, consultation with prescribing doctors, or a follow-up care plan.
- This reckless decision has contributed to my son's worsening condition and increased psychiatric hospitalizations.

5. Failure to Ensure Supervision and Safety

- [REDACTED] has repeatedly gone AWOL from his STRTP (Short-Term Residential Therapeutic Program) and has been involved in unlawful activities, including vehicle theft and property damage.
- Despite clear evidence of safety risks, Santa Cruz County Social Services has taken no steps to ensure proper supervision or placement in a more secure environment.

6. Refusal to Engage in Family Reunification or Meaningful Support

- [REDACTED] has expressed conflicting statements about wanting to return home, yet Santa Cruz County Social Services has made no effort to assess his competency or provide family therapy.

- The agency's refusal to engage in family-based support has only further alienated [REDACTED] and exacerbated his behavioral challenges.

Request for Immediate Action

Due to the continued failure of Santa Cruz County Social Services under the leadership of Randy Morris, I formally request:

1. **A Full Investigation** into the negligence, lack of intervention, and systemic failures of Santa Cruz County Social Services in handling this case.
2. **Immediate Transfer of [REDACTED]' Case** to a county with trauma-informed professionals, such as Santa Clara or Alameda County, where he has already received competent and compassionate engagement.
3. **Accountability for Randy Morris and his Department** for their failure to act in a way that ensures the safety and well-being of a vulnerable foster youth.
4. **A Court-Ordered Psychological Assessment** to formally determine [REDACTED] cognitive capacity, mental health needs, and appropriate placement.

Santa Cruz County Social Services has demonstrated gross incompetence in managing this case, placing my son at further risk. Their continued negligence should not be allowed to persist without consequence. I request urgent action before further harm occurs.

Sincerely,
Melissa Schilling

Sincerely,
Melissa Schilling
[REDACTED]

