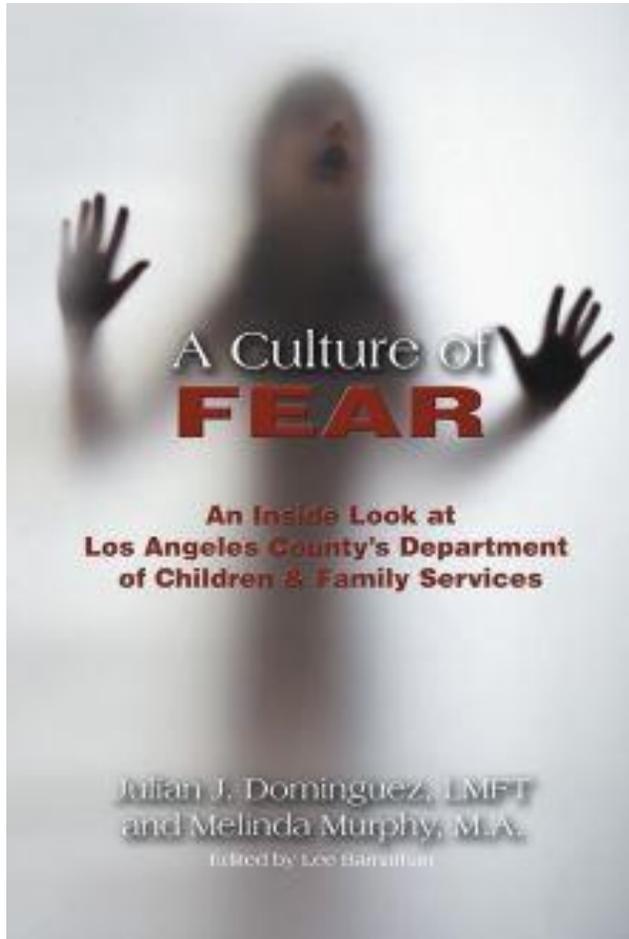


# A Culture of Fear: An Inside Look at Los Angeles County's Department of Children & Family Services

Julian J. Dominguez, LMFT and Melinda Murphy, M.A.



## About the Book

This book is very unique by all measures. It is meant to serve as a starting point to evoke meaningful dialogue resulting in reform and needed change inside the largest child protective services agency in the country, Los Angeles County's Department of Children & Family Services (DCFS).

A Culture of Fear takes you inside the agency as it exposes some of the most serious deficiencies. Julian J. Dominguez and Melinda Murphy, current and former DCFS employees, respectively, detail systemic core issues that include a lack of integrity in DCFS court report writing. They also tell how reunification of families is marginalized or set aside while other personal or political priorities take precedence. Departmental positions, personality conflicts, prejudices, and "cover your ass at all costs" tend to rule.

The authors shine a light on the valiant struggles of social workers, and tell how values can stray far from the agency's publicly proclaimed mission, which is to protect children and reunify families.

## About the Authors



**Julian J. Dominguez, LMFT**, received his master's degree from Chapman University in marriage, family, and child counseling. He is a licensed MFT and his specialties include child welfare, sexual assault, vicarious trauma, and critical incident debriefing. He has worked for DCFS since 1996. As a family group decision-making practitioner, he facilitated over 1,500 family and emancipation conferences.



**Melinda Murphy, M.A.**, worked in child welfare for over 20 years. She is currently a social work investigator with a nonprofit agency in Los Angeles. She earned her master's at the University of Nevada, Reno, was a caseworker with Children of the Night, which helped get children in prostitution and pornography off the streets of Hollywood, and then worked with DCFS.

## Excerpts from the book:

“ Pity the poor social worker who tries to correct the wrong and alert the court or a supervisor. Neither DCFS [Los Angeles County Department of Children & Family Services) nor the attorneys who represent DCFS admits to making mistakes, so even if parents are innocent, DCFS’s tendency is to make them guilty in some way.

*Those who work in the system for an extended time learn that foster care is a disaster and doesn’t work.*

*Throwing money at a broken system isn’t the answer. Foster care providers to receive reimbursement for taking care of foster children, and licensed group homes receive on average between \$7,000-\$8,000 per month per child. That’s like a parent spending \$84,000-\$96,000 per year on his or her own child. And with few exceptions, where the money goes each month is not transparent.*

*The petition that is crafter when children are first removed is pivotal in establishing the basis and direction of the case against the allegedly offending family members. An attorney that never sees or even has a single conversation with the accused family member writes the petition, and it usually follows the adage, “Throw enough mud at the wall and some of it will stick?”*

*...Phantom authors rewrite court reports. These phantom authors are supervisors, their bosses (ARAs), their bosses’ bosses (Regional Administrators, or RAs), or even higher-ups. They remain in the shadows behind the curtain, routinely censoring, slanting, and omitting facts and sometimes even tampering with court reports, day in and day out. These are the very same court reports that can and do determine if a family is made whole again, if children will be returned to their mothers, fathers, or other family members.*

*What is most incredulous and disconcerting is that these secret ghostwriters, in the overwhelmingly vast majority of cases, never have even a single conversation with the family in question...*

*These phantoms have absolute immunity from accountability for the decisions, judgements, and recommendations they write on the court reports.*

*Our social workers are subsequently left to pick up the pieces by being forced to sign court report after court report in which they substantively disagree with the phantom authors because they know the truth from their experience and training. These social workers are unequivocally told to sign, as to refuse would be insubordination, or worse.”*

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Publisher’s website:

<http://sbprabooks.com/JulianJDominquezandMelindaMurphy>