

Claudio: Tahoe Victims of CPS need to be heard

Letter to the publisher,

On Dec. 8, four members of Tahoe Victims of CPS spoke at the South Lake Tahoe City Council meeting. The Tahoe Victims of CPS asked the council to endorse the Parents Bill of Rights giving better protection to children seized by Child Protective Services (CPS). At the end of the council meeting, under "Announcements", Councilmen Bill Crawford and Jerry Birdwell spoke in support of Tahoe Victims of CPS and the efforts to reform CPS and the foster care system.

Councilman Crawford spent his career in the school system, mainly with the continuation school, which he helped to create in South Lake Tahoe. His position gave him access to information not readily available to the public about the money in foster care. He cited an example involving two girls from Sacramento sent to live in a group home in South Lake Tahoe. The group home received monthly checks from Sacramento County for \$1,800 for the first girl and \$2,100 for the second girl.

Both girls were in Councilman Crawford's class and one day the girls reported they did not have breakfast because there was no food in the house. Councilman Crawford stated that he has never seen a child from a group home come to school in a new winter coat. He observed that foster care parents fit into two categories; older people trying to make up for their shortcomings as parents and those searching for ways to supplement their incomes. Councilman Crawford said, "There is a real problem out there."

Councilman Birdwell, a former judge in the state of Texas, mentioned his talks with Superior Court judges in the state of

California and found they had the same problems with CPS as the judges in Texas. The problems stem from the turnover of CPS employees, often right out of college with no experience, put in stressful positions where they often "over reacted" to the detriment of the children they were supposed to be protecting. Councilman Birdwell concluded by saying he hopes the El Dorado County Board of Supervisors will hear the complaints and do something about the way CPS is handling these children.

Ernie Claudio, co-founder of Tahoe Victims of CPS