

BEFORE THE
OFFICE OF ADMINISTRATIVE HEARINGS
STATE OF CALIFORNIA

In the Matter of:

JENNIFER H.

Claimant,

vs.

EASTERN LOS ANGELES REGIONAL
CENTER,

Service Agency.

OAH No. 2012120673

DECISION

This matter was heard before Glynda B. Gomez, Administrative Law Judge, Office of Administrative Hearings, State of California, on January 30, 2013 in Alhambra, California.

Gerard Torres, Supervisor, represented Eastern Los Angeles Regional Center (ELARC), the service agency.

Claimant Jennifer H. (Claimant) was represented by her father (Father). Claimant's mother (Mother) was also present and assisted by a certified Vietnamese language interpreter.

At the request of the parties, OAH Case numbers 2012120673, 2012120678, 2012120680 and 2012120786 were consolidated for hearing purposes only. Evidence was received, the record was closed, and the matter was submitted for decision on January 30, 2013.

ISSUE

Whether ELARC must place Claimant in the same facility with her two siblings and in the City of Alhambra when out of home respite is required.

FACTUAL FINDINGS

1. Claimant is a nine year- old girl eligible for regional center services based upon her diagnosis of Autism. Claimant has severe sleep apnea, but is otherwise in good health.

2. Claimant lives with her parents and three siblings. Two of her siblings are also regional center consumers. Neither of her parents works outside the home. Mother is a full-time care giver for the children. Father suffered a work- related back injury and is unable to work or care for the children by himself.

3. Claimant's Individual Program Plan (IPP) dated September 24, 2012 provides for up to 21 days per year of out of home respite. Claimant also receives 30 hours per month of in home respite care. Respite care is provided by her uncle.

4. In 2010 and 2011, Claimant used in home respite in lieu of out of home respite when Mother took a vacation to Vietnam for three weeks to see her family. At that time, Father and Claimant's uncle, her respite worker, cared for Claimant and her siblings in the family home while Mother was away. In 2012, Claimant again requested the same arrangement. However, ELARC's purchase of service policy had changed in response to changes in the Lanterman Act. Claimant's parents were advised by ELARC that "in home respite in lieu of out of home respite" had been eliminated except in instances in which the regional center was unable to provide out of home respite. In August of 2012, ELARC located a facility that would accommodate Claimant and her two regional center consumer siblings. Father did not approve of the facility and Mother cancelled her trip. In a decision after a fair hearing held on August 12, 2012, an administrative law judge determined that ELARC had met its obligations to Claimant by providing out of home respite and that ELARC was not required to provide "in home respite in lieu of out of home respite" because appropriate out of home accommodations were located by ELARC.

5. ELARC's purchase of service policy provides that "Out-of-home respite service" means "intermittent or regularly scheduled temporary care provided outside the consumer's home by a vendored service provider." Providers in this category include adult day care centers, child care centers, residential facilities, and intermediate care facilities. According to the purchase of service policy, out-of-home respite is appropriate when occasional family and/or consumer needs are more than the support of friends, natural and community supports can provide. Additionally, out of home respite may be used as support option should family members have planned activities which preclude the participation of the consumer such as vacations, hospitalizations or, family emergencies.

6. Claimant now requests that ELARC be required to find an out of home respite provider that will accommodate her and her two disabled siblings within the City of Alhambra. Father wants to visit Claimant and her siblings while Mother is

away and it is more convenient for him, if all of the children are in the same location and less disruptive to the children.

7. Claimant and her parents have been unable to provide ELARC with any proposed dates for use of out of home respite and were unable to provide dates for out of home respite use at the time of hearing.

8. ELARC supervisor Elizabeth Ornelas (Ornelas) credibly testified that it would artificially constrain ELARC's ability to locate an appropriate placement for Claimant, if ELARC was geographically restricted to placing Claimant and her two siblings within the City of Alhambra and in the same facility. In August of 2012, ELARC was able to locate placements for all three children in the same facility within the ELARC catchment area, but Claimant's parents did not approve the placement. According to Ornelas, the more advance notice Claimant's parents are able to provide to ELARC, the more likely their preferences can be honored. ELARC's primary concern is an appropriate placement for Claimant's needs and secondarily placing her with her siblings. ELARC is not able to start the process of locating placement for Claimant until her parents provide it with the dates that the service will be needed so that ELARC staff can make inquiries with its vendors about availability.

LEGAL CONCLUSIONS

1. The Lanterman Development Disabilities Services Act¹ sets forth a regional center's obligations and responsibilities to provide services to individuals with developmental disabilities. As the California Supreme Court explained in *Assocation for Retarded Citizens v. Department of Developmental Services* (1985) 38 Cal.3d 384, 388, the purpose of the Lanterman Act is twofold: to prevent or minimize the institutionalization of developmentally disabled persons and their dislocation from family and community and to enable them to approximate the pattern of everyday living of nondisabled persons of the same age and to lead more independent and productive lives in the community.

2. In enacting the Lanterman Act, the Legislature accepted responsibility to provide for the needs of developmentally disabled individuals, and recognized that services and supports should be established to meet the needs and choices of each person with developmental disabilities. (Welf. & Inst. Code §4501.) Appropriate services and supports include in-home and out-of-home respite services. (Welf. & Inst. Code §4512, subd. (b).) Thus, regional centers are responsible for developing and implementing IPPs, for taking into account a consumer's needs and preferences, and for ensuring that services are cost-effective. (Welf. & Inst. Code §§ 4646, 4646.5, 4647, and 4648.)

¹ Welfare and Institutions Code section 4500, et. seq.

3. The Lanterman Act gives regional centers, such as ELARC, a critical role in the coordination and delivery of services and supports for person with disabilities. (Welf. & Inst. Code § 4620 et. seq.) It is the intent of the Legislature to ensure that the individual program plan and provision of services and supports by the regional center system is centered on the individual and the family of the individual with developmental disabilities and takes into account the needs and preferences of the individual and the family, where appropriate, as well as promoting community integration, independent, productive and normal lives, and stable and healthy environments. It is the further intent of the Legislature to ensure that the provision of services to consumers and their families be effective in meeting the goals stated in the individual program plan, reflect the preferences and choices of the consumer, and reflect the cost-effective use of public resources. (Welf. & Inst. Code §4646.)

4. Effective, July 1, 2009, a regional center may only purchase respite services when the care and supervision needs of a consumer exceed that of an individual of the same age without developmental disabilities. (Welf. & Inst. Code § 4686.5, subd. (a)(1)) A regional center shall not purchase more than 21 days of out-of-home respite services in a fiscal year nor more than 90 hours of in-home respite services in a quarter, for a consumer. (Welf. & Inst. Code § 4686.5, subd. (a)(2). A regional center may grant an exemption from these requirements, if it is demonstrated that the intensity of the consumer's care and supervision needs are such that additional respite is necessary to maintain the consumer in the family home, or there is an extraordinary event that impacts the family member's ability to meet the care and supervision needs of the consumer. (Welf. & Inst. Code § 4686.5, subd. (a)(3).)

5. Here, Claimant has not provided ELARC with any proposed dates to use of out of home respite. While a request to place Claimant and her two siblings together in the City of Alhambra may be difficult to accommodate, ELARC is willing to explore such a placement when Claimant's family has firm plans and can provide dates that the service will be needed. Claimant's argument that ELARC should be required to place Claimant and her two siblings together in a placement within the City of Alhambra is not convincing and is not required by the Lanterman Act or the ELARC purchase of service policy. ELARC's first concern in placement must always be for an appropriate placement to meet Claimant's needs. ELARC should continue its efforts to honor the preferences of Claimant's family, but location of an appropriate out of home placement for Claimant during out of home respite services does not require that such preferences be met. (Factual Findings 1-8 and Legal Conclusions 1-5.)

ORDER

Claimant's appeal is denied.

DATED: February 13, 2013



GLYNDA B. GOMEZ
Administrative Law Judge
Office of Administrative Hearings

NOTICE

This is the final administrative decision in this matter. Each party is bound by this decision. An appeal from the decision must be made to a court of competent jurisdiction within 90 days of receipt of the decision. (Welf. & Inst. Code, § 4712.5, subd. (a).)