



CWDA

May 29, 2015

To: The Honorable Mark Leno, Chair
Budget Conference Committee

Honorable Members
Budget Conference Committee



RE: Child Welfare Services—Foster Parent and Kinship Recruitment, Retention and Support: SUPPORT ASSEMBLY VERSION



California Alliance
OF CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES

Dear Chair Leno and Members:



The undersigned agencies and organizations strongly urge your support of the ASSEMBLY version of the budget which would provide \$27.8 million General Fund for Foster Parent and Kinship Recruitment, Retention and Support. This targeted investment is a necessary precursor for implementing the Administration's Continuum of Care Reform (CCR) recommendations. We support the CCR goals of reducing the use of group homes and placing foster children with high quality, loving and permanent family homes. However, realizing the vision of CCR will require the State and counties to increase the number of high quality foster family homes and relatives and to support those families so that they can provide the best care for our foster children.



CHILDREN NOW

Both the state and counties share in a parental role to protect and serve over 63,000 children who have been removed from their homes due to abuse and neglect through the State's foster care system. These agencies are required by law to first consider placement with relatives and if unavailable, next with licensed foster parents. Family caregivers help foster children overcome their abuse and trauma in a supportive environment. Relatives help the foster child maintain connection with their family and community, and often are able to maintain sibling groups together while in care. Relatives and licensed foster parents often provide a permanent home through adoption or guardianship when foster children cannot safely return home.



JOHN BURTON FOUNDATION
FOR CHILDREN WITHOUT HOMES



Although foster care caseloads have dropped by nearly 40% since 2003, the loss of county licensed foster care homes has outpaced this decline. Specifically, between 2003 and 2013, counties have lost over 50% of its licensed foster family homes, while placements with relatives has increased slightly over this time, with 36% of all children now placed with relative caregivers. These relatives often care for their related foster children on a moment's notice and are ill-prepared for the task of fostering.



Lack of adequate supports for both kin and licensed foster parents discourages new families from fostering and hurts counties' ability to recruit and retain high quality caregivers. Without adequate supports, these foster caregivers can easily become overwhelmed with their caregiving responsibilities, which can lead to placement disruptions and other poor outcomes for foster children, including placements into institutional placement settings such as group homes, which are much more costly for tax payers and less desirable for children.



The Assembly version of the budget will provide much needed supports for foster and kin caregivers, and importantly for the children in their care, specifically:

Targeted recruitment efforts: We need a deep and broad pool of foster families so that foster children can be matched to families who can meet their unique needs, for example, some foster parents prefer older youth or sibling groups, while some prefer to mentor and support an LGBTQ foster youth. Targeted recruitment will help improve foster youth outcomes as a result of better matching between foster families and foster children. Foster parents can also serve as recruitment ambassadors and mentors to other foster parents.

Direct Services and Supports to Foster and Kin Caregivers: Examples of services often requested by foster parents and kin caregivers include respite care, child care, additional training, support to participate in team-based meetings concerning children in their care, and covering one-time expenses such purchasing an extra bed. In addition, this fund can assist foster parents and kin caregivers to pay for activities that will help “normalize” a child’s experience in the foster care system (e.g. participation in school-based activities). Finally, these funds can be used to supplement existing rates for short-term stays to avoid placement into an institutional setting such as a shelter or group home.

Intensive Relative Search and Engagement: Research shows that children in foster care benefit from placements that provide continuity to family, and relative caregivers are often able to take sibling groups, thus preventing their separation. Statewide, approximately 35% of foster placements occur with relatives. With additional searching, engagement and in-home support, we can avert placements into group homes and these relatives can provide a permanent, loving home through adoption or guardianship.

Our Coalition strongly supports additional funding to help recruit, retain and support family caregivers who can provide stable, loving homes for foster children. We thank you for your consideration of our request and for your continued support of the State’s foster children.

Sincerely,

Frank J. Mecca, Executive Director
County Welfare Directors Association of CA

Farrah McDaid-Ting, Legislative Representative, Health and Human Services
California State Association of Counties

Patricia Nagis, President
California State Foster Parent Association

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