



Family Urgent Response System for Foster Youth and Caregivers

Problem: Foster Youth and Caregivers Need Real-Time Support

Under Continuum of Care Reform, California is reforming our foster care system to ensure that abused and neglected children receive the timely trauma-informed services they need to heal and thrive within a family and not an institution. Unfortunately, as caregivers and children who have experienced trauma seek to develop a family relationship, they are often left alone to navigate misunderstandings and frustrations without the immediate guidance they need to create a nurturing environment. Caregivers and the children in their homes need real-time assistance during moments of crisis and uncertainty. Without supports and services available on demand, caregivers can feel helpless and unable to manage critical situations, leading them to give up. These preventable disruptions of care can leave a foster child feeling even more abandoned and traumatized. Without support, caregivers sometimes believe their only option is calling the police to help them manage trauma-induced behaviors. When law enforcement is brought into a non-life-threatening situation with a foster child, the caregivers and the already traumatized children are likely to see the crisis escalate rather than stabilize—leading to the inappropriate criminalization of the foster child that will have lifelong impacts.

Proposed Solution: Family Urgent Response System for Foster Youth and Caregivers

The California Family Urgent Response System would:

- 1) Establish a statewide, toll-free hotline available 24 hours a day and 7 days a week to caregivers and children and youth in the foster care system who are experiencing emotional, behavioral or other difficulties and need immediate help. The statewide hotline would be staffed with operators trained in conflict resolution and de-escalation who will provide immediate assistance over the phone to help defuse the conflict or crisis, and will triage the situation to determine whether mobile, in-home support is needed.
- 2) Require counties' child welfare and behavioral health agencies to establish mobile response teams to provide face-to-face, in-home response on a 24/7 basis to help defuse and stabilize a situation, assess the caregiver's and child's needs, and develop a plan of action. Counties would be expected to provide the family with needed ongoing services through the existing local network of care service systems.

Achieving Desired Outcomes: Increase Stability and Decrease Re-Traumatization

Urgent Response will provide children and families with the support they need to be successful and increase placement stability for youth in foster care. Access to immediate intervention services, through telephone support and in-person mobile response, will help children and their caregivers develop strong and healthy relationships, even in challenging situations. This approach will also decrease avoidable calls to law enforcement and ensure fewer contacts between system-involved youth and the criminal justice system. The Family Urgent Response System for Foster Youth and Caregivers will help to ensure foster families receive the immediate support they need and allow foster children to heal and thrive in homes and not institutions.