



February 25, 2019

To: The Honorable Dr. Joaquin Arambula
Chair, Assembly Budget Subcommittee No. 1

Honorable Members
Assembly Budget Subcommittee No. 1

From: Justin Garrett, Legislative Representative, California State Association of Counties
Sharon Rapport, Associate Director, Corporation for Supportive Housing
Frank J. Mecca, Executive Director, County Welfare Directors Association
Christopher Martin, Legislative Advocate, Housing California

RE: CHILD WELFARE SERVICES – BRINGING FAMILIES HOME

The California State Association of Counties (CSAC), Corporation for Supportive Housing (CSH), County Welfare Directors Association of California (CWDA) and Housing California respectfully request your support to provide a one-time appropriation of \$25 million General Fund (GF) for fiscal years 2019-20 and 2020-21 to continue and expand the existing Bringing Families Home (BFH) Program, which provides critical housing-related supports to child-welfare involved homeless families and those at risk of homelessness in support of family reunification and family maintenance efforts.

The Legislature established the BFH Program through the 2016-17 Budget Act, appropriating \$10 million GF on a one-time basis to the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) to administer this program for three years. This funding authority for the program will end on June 30, 2019. Twelve counties currently participate in the program,¹ and these counties are required to provide a one-to-one dollar match for funds received. The program promotes supportive housing and rapid re-housing of families involved in the child welfare system, with first priority to support family reunification efforts and, as funds allow, to maintain families together when children are at risk of abuse and neglect.

Counties launched the program in July 2017 and began serving families in the fall of 2017. In just over one year the program has had a significant positive impact to parents and their children. CDSS reports that as of November 2018, 440 families have been permanently

¹ Participating counties include: Kings, Los Angeles, Orange, Sacramento, San Diego, San Francisco, San Luis Obispo, Santa Clara, Santa Cruz, Solano, Sonoma and Yolo.

housed, with another 1,100 families identified, assessed and in process of securing needed housing. County child welfare agencies have seen children who were removed into foster care due to abuse and neglect return home sooner as a result of this program. For at risk children, BFH has helped keep families intact and likely prevented removals into foster care. Families who were living day-by-day, month-to-month, in hotels and sleeping in their cars with their children found homes with the help of the BFH Program. Please refer to Attachment A for additional vignettes from families who were successfully housed.

While the formal evaluation of the BFH program is not expected to be finalized until sometime in late 2019 or early 2020, the program already shows great promise, consistent with other research studies demonstrating that homeless prevention programs like BFH work to avoid foster care placement and allow for reunification of birth parents and children in foster care. Research data demonstrate getting families who are homeless into stable, safe, permanent housing prevents foster care placement and furthers reunification with birth families. Moreover, data demonstrate the housing strategies advanced by BFH work to decrease rates of homelessness among families with children, and decrease foster care, incarceration, and health costs.

Linking families to secure and stable housing has far reaching benefits beyond the child welfare program. Research shows stable housing leads to reduced parental stress, increases school stability and improves child well-being. Providing a sense of “home” gives families the foundation for healing together that can enable them to work towards achieving their California dream.

Unfortunately, the BFH Program is scheduled to sunset on June 30, 2019. There are over 1,100 families already in the queue to be served by the BFH Program, and many counties are reporting families on waiting lists for services. Without an extension, counties will be forced to begin dismantling the program. It is imperative to build on the momentum for serving families and their at-risk children in need of housing assistance.

For this reason, we urge your support for a one-time augmentation of \$25 million GF for the next two fiscal years to enable these twelve counties to meet the current need while allowing for some modest expansion of the program to additional counties.

Our Coalition is also in process of finalizing Trailer Bill Language (TBL) to reflect lessons learned in this new program that will strengthen implementation and improve housing supports to families. We will provide this proposed TBL shortly.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Attachment: County Vignettes

cc: Gail Gronert, Office of the Assembly Speaker
Jason Sisney, Office of the Assembly Speaker
Nicole Vazquez, Assembly Budget Subcommittee No. 1
Cyndi Hillery, Assembly Republican Fiscal Office
Marla Cowan, Office of Assembly Member Joaquin Arambula
Mark Newton, Legislative Analyst's Office
Ginni Bella Navarre, Legislative Analyst's Office
Marko Mijic, Health and Human Services Agency
Pat Leary, California Department of Social Services
Robert Smith, California Department of Social Services
Kären Dickerson, California Department of Social Services
Adam Dorsey, HHS, Department of Finance
Jay Kapoor, HHS, Department of Finance
County Caucus