



**CWDA**

Advancing Human Services  
for the Welfare of *All* Californians

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Honorable Gavin Newsom  
Governor, State of California  
State Capitol Building  
Sacramento, CA 95814

**RE: CHILD WELFARE SERVICES: URGE SUPPORT FOR  
PREVENTION, EMERGENCY RESPONSE SERVICES  
AND RESOURCE FAMILY APPROVAL**

The County Welfare Directors Association of California (CWDA) urges your support for the investments made in the Senate and Assembly Joint State Budget Plan above the Administration's May Revision levels to support the child welfare and foster care system. Several proposals championed by CWDA are included in this request, specifically:

**Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) – Prevention Services**

We appreciate the Administration's proposed one-time, \$122.4 million General Fund (GF) investment into prevention services. We also urge your support for the \$100 million in on-going funding adopted by the Legislature, in addition to the one-time funds. CWDA and Children Now are co-sponsoring a joint request supported by a coalition of nearly 70 organizations that will enable counties to partner with communities, existing service providers, and families and youth with lived experience in the system, to build and expand locally driven prevention services for children, youth and families. This investment leverages new federal Title IV-E funding to support counties' work with communities of color, tribes, and LGBTQ+ families and youth, but will go further than the limited services funded by the new federal law. The goal is to keep families safely together and prevent the need for entries into the foster care system whenever possible.

Disparities and disproportionality in the child welfare system that have persisted for years have been amplified and made worse with the stressors caused by the pandemic. The state has an opportunity to provide the critical funding necessary to begin building out these prevention services to move the child welfare system further in the direction of supporting families in need and reducing known disparities in the system with a particular focus on communities overrepresented in the system today. This must be done statewide, however, and not in the "optional" manner proposed by the Administration. For these reasons we urge full funding of the prevention efforts in the May Revision and the Legislative package along

with trailer bill language to provide statewide allocations and planning expectations for counties and their partner agencies.

### **Support for Foster Youth with Complex Needs**

A small percentage of youth served by county child welfare agencies have extremely complex needs stemming from significant maltreatment and untreated trauma. This can lead to behaviors over which the youth have little control. It can also lead county agencies to have few options for safe placements that provide the necessary services, as providers are allowed to reject requested placements as well as eject youth from their care when incidents occur. This long-standing issue predated the Continuum of Care reform enacted by AB 403 (Stone, Statutes of 2015), and has not been fully addressed by the state agencies responsible for ensuring an array of services and placements are available to counties.

AB 2083 (Cooley, Statutes of 2018) required a cross-departmental, state-level committee, convened by the Health and Human Services Agency, to identify gaps in the state's placement array for the most complex cases and recommend changes to fill those gaps. The report is overdue. In the meantime, counties grapple with limited in-state options for an estimated 200 to 250 youth with the most complex needs at any given time.

For these reasons, CWDA urges support for the Senate and Assembly Joint State Budget Plan to provide an additional \$100 million in on-going funding to support youth with complex needs. This is in addition to the \$39 million proposed in the May Revision. We urge adoption of the total amount because significant investments are urgently needed to build capacity in California to serve these youth. Dozens of youth placed by child welfare and probation agencies were returned to California earlier this year after the CDSS-housed licensing agency decertified every out of state placement option in an unexpected blanket order. About 40 percent of these youth were placed with relative caregivers initially, but those numbers have dropped over the last three months as placements in juvenile hall and congregate care facilities have increased. As well, the number of youth who have run away, or are otherwise absent from their placement, has increased.

CWDA has joined with Seneca Family of Agencies and the Chief Probation Officers of California (CPOC) to co-sponsor AB 808 by Assembly Member Stone, which establishes a crisis continuum pilot program and supports development of services for youth who have not yet reached the crisis point but need a higher level of care to support them. We urge adoption of trailer bill language consistent with AB 808 to support greater use of family-based services, including Expedited Assessment and Transition Planning, Specialized Foster Homes, and services for youth with co-occurring developmental/intellectual disabilities. We see this effort as a bridge to completion of the work mandated by AB 2083.

Finally, while we strongly support the funding investment provided by the Legislature, we

oppose its adoption of a moratorium on out of state placements. This action is premature given the continued lack of services within the state for youth with the most complex needs, particularly those with significant behavioral health or developmental issues and those who have been commercially sexually exploited. Until counties can secure the appropriate services in California for a particular youth, it is possible that the best place for that youth could be with an out-of-state provider. This is not to say we are advocating “business as usual” when it comes to placing children out of state – quite the opposite. For example, counties might work with the CDSS Community Care Licensing Division, on a case-by-case basis, in the relatively few instances where it is broadly agreed that no appropriate California-based placement exists, but a reputable, responsible, and otherwise appropriate out of state placement has been identified.

It is not in the best interest of our children and youth to arbitrarily cut off access to an avenue that may best meet their needs on a short-term basis while the necessary supports are built within California. We welcome a dialogue with the Legislature, Administration, and other stakeholders regarding potential heightened gatekeeping, better communication between the licensing division and counties, and other changes to the certification and placement process to ensure oversight is in place for these limited situations. In the meantime, we urge you to move the funds forward without a moratorium on all out-of-state placements.

### **Emergency Response Social Workers**

CWDA supports the Senate and Assembly Joint State Budget to provide \$50 million SGF in each 2021-22, 2022-23, and 2023-24 to support counties’ emergency response system. During the pandemic, calls to Child Protective Service hotlines dropped sharply as families sequestered, childcare centers closed, wellness visits were reduced, and schools shifted to remote learning. The professionals who are our “mandated reporters” and usually able to observe possible signs of abuse and neglect were prevented from doing so as a result of these changes.

Statewide, the average number of CPS hotline calls dropped 10 percentage points from 2019 to 2020, but in many counties the declines were even steeper. A [recent study](#) published in the international peer-reviewed journal *Child Abuse & Neglect* estimates that about 100,000 children were missed for child abuse and neglect in the United State from March 2020 to December 2020 because of decreased reporting.

When calls were investigated, counties report more severe child safety issues due to the isolation families experienced and more children exposed to serious incidents of domestic violence. As children return to school this fall we anticipate both higher numbers of reports and more serious safety issues that will strain our local Emergency Response operations. The provision of this one-time funding for use over three years will allow counties to hire additional staff to promote timely investigations of child maltreatment, handle the more

complex cases we anticipate seeing going forward, and increase engagement with families to address maltreatment.

### Resource Family Approval

CWDA urges your support for \$85 million SGF as provided in the Senate and Assembly Joint State Budget Plan to support the Resource Family Approval (RFA) process. These costs have been absorbed by counties for years as a result of the Continuum of Care Reform effort. The RFA process was established as a pilot program in only five counties when 2011 Realignment was enacted. Through CCR, RFA requirements were expanded statewide via legislation and administrative directives which have not been funded as required under Proposition 30.

RFA is a staff-intensive process that requires county staff to provide direct support to resource families as they go through the approval process. As counties incur the costs of the unfunded RFA mandate, fewer resources are left to help families care for a foster child or youth. Having to shift funding to RFA also undermines counties' ability to fulfill other child welfare mandates or enact system improvements.

Under RFA, all caregivers receive pre-approval training that better prepares the family for their role as foster caregivers. Required family assessments allow for better matching of foster children and resource parents and identification of support needs. This work must be funded to meet CCR goals and build the capacity of family based caregivers throughout the state.

We urge your support for these critical child welfare and foster care investments made in the Senate and Assembly Joint State Budget Plan and thank you for your consideration

Sincerely,



Cathy Senderling-McDonald  
Executive Director

cc: Ana Matosantos, Cabinet Secretary, Office of Governor Gavin Newsom  
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Honorable Toni Atkins, Senate President Pro Tempore  
Honorable Anthony Rendon, Speaker of the Assembly  
Honorable Nancy Skinner, Chair, Senate Budget and Fiscal Review Committee  
Honorable Phil Ting, Chair, Assembly Budget Committee  
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