



January 29, 2021

To: The Honorable Susan Talamantes Eggman  
Chair, Senate Budget Subcommittee No. 3

Honorable Members  
Senate Budget Subcommittee No. 3

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

Honorable Members  
Assembly Budget Subcommittee No. 1

From: Cathy Senderling-McDonald, Executive Director, CWDA  
Susanna Kniffen, Senior Director, Child Welfare Policy, Children NOW

**RE: CHILD WELFARE SERVICES: FAMILY FIRST  
PREVENTION SERVICES**

The County Welfare Directors Association of California (CWDA) and Children Now jointly request an augmentation of \$50 million General Fund (GF) in FY 2021-22, and \$100 million on-going, to build locally driven services and supports for children, youth and families at risk of entering foster care. The goal of this effort is to keep families safely together and prevent the need for entries into the foster care system whenever possible. This investment would leverage federal Title IV-E funding to support counties' work with communities of color to strengthen families that are historically over-represented in the child welfare system, in order to address and reduce known inequities and disparities in the system.

Recent historic legislation —the federal Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) of 2018 —provides a \$1 match for every \$1 invested for evidence-based prevention services in the areas of mental health, substance abuse, in-home parenting skills, and kinship navigator programs. Our organizations see FFPSA as the catalyst to enable California to begin shifting towards a child welfare system that looks first to strengthen families and communities through a broad array of culturally relevant prevention services developed and delivered in partnership with local communities.

Historically, California counties have relied upon a very limited and inadequate pool of federal

funds to deliver direct services to children, youth and families served by child welfare and to support a relatively small number of these families in family maintenance programs rather than in foster care. Until recently, seven counties participated in a Title IV-E demonstration waiver for flexible funding, but the authority for this waiver has expired, leaving counties with few options for providing direct services intended to support families to safely stay together and prevent entry into the foster care system.

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, which has negatively and disproportionately impacted communities of color. Statewide data indicates that between July 2019 and June 2020, 51.3% of children who entered foster care were reunified with their families, ***suggesting that if high quality services could have been provided prior to removal, the need for foster care could potentially have been averted for some families.*** FFPSA provides the opportunity for counties to build services and tangible supports needed by families and in turn, begin to invest in a broader prevention continuum in collaboration with their local communities.

In order to begin this critical work, we respectfully request \$50 million GF in FY 2021-22 (which leverages up to \$50 million in additional federal funding), and \$100 million GF on an on-going basis, to be invested in the following ways:

- \$45 million GF (\$95 million ongoing) for direct services and supports to children, youth and families including mental health, substance abuse, in-home parenting skills, and kinship navigator programs as well as tangible supports for families. This proposal requires collaborations with community-based organizations and coordination of services available through other state and local programs. The exact array of available services, and how counties would work to engage families, would be locally driven through a robust community-based planning process and would include county partners such as probation agencies and county behavioral health plans.
- \$4 million GF (initial and on-going) for state infrastructure necessary to meet federal FFPSA requirements including evaluation, reporting, and supporting model fidelity.
- \$1 million GF (initial and on-going) for training to build the knowledge and skills for community-based service providers and county staff to deliver evidence-based, culturally informed and promising practices.

This investment will support early prevention efforts to prevent removals from the home, keeping families together with services, reducing the risk of future maltreatment, and promoting the safety and well-being of the child within their family unit. It is important that the state 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.

For all these reasons, we urge your support for this request.

cc: Chris Woods, Office of the Senate President Pro Tempore  
Mareva Brown, Office of the Senate President Pro Tempore  
Jason Sisney, Office of the Speaker of the Assembly  
Gail Gronert, Office of the Speaker of the Assembly  
Renita Polk, Senate Budget and Fiscal Review Subcommittee No. 3  
Nicole Vazquez, Assembly Committee on Budget Subcommittee No. 1  
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County Caucus