



# CAPITOL WEEKLY

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## Restore child welfare funding: Our most vulnerable children deserve no less

By [Cathi Grams](#) | 04/22/10

When I stand before the Board of Supervisors in my county, it's my job to assure them and the public we serve that Butte County is doing everything possible to keep kids safe and help families overcome challenges that too often lead to children being removed from their homes. Our future generation deserves no less than a safe home to grow up in and a fair shot at a bright future.

So when decisions made in Sacramento force our county to cut back on child welfare services, it's also my job to speak up for the funding that is essential to protecting our children and investing in our future.

We must hold Governor Schwarzenegger accountable for going back on the commitment he made to California's most vulnerable children.

Unconscionable cuts that harm children who have already suffered from abuse and neglect are putting our children at greater risk, thanks to the Governor's decision to veto \$80 million in funding for child welfare services. The Governor's action – made against the Legislature's decision that child welfare was an urgent priority – caused the state to lose another \$40 million in federal funding to protect kids. Today, the Senate Budget Subcommittee on Health and Human Services will consider reinstating the vetoed funds in the coming year's budget, an action that is crucial to protecting California's vulnerable kids.

Butte County Children's Services, like child welfare departments across the state, must respond 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to reports of child abuse and neglect. Our trained social workers make life or death decisions about our most vulnerable children on a daily basis. When it's safe and in the child's best interest, we help reunite children with their families, and when it's not, our county assumes legal parental responsibility and works to find stable and loving families to care for these children.

Without these services, children may be returned to their parents prior to correcting the root problems that brought them to Children's Services' in the first place and have an increased likelihood of reentry into foster care. At the same time, the length of time a child spends in foster care could lengthen if the parents are unable to get the services they need.

State reductions have already resulted in the loss of 529 social workers across the state. In my county of Butte, layoffs mean we risk being unable to adequately staff child abuse hotlines, investigate child abuse allegations, assist families with ensuring their child's safety, and work with families to safely reunify children or find permanent, loving homes for those who cannot be reunified.

The Governor proposes continuing this cut next year, and California communities will pay the price for his decision. We will have even fewer social workers to help families mend their homes and find children permanent, loving homes. Transitional services that help foster kids find jobs and housing when they "age out" of the system at 18 are on the chopping block. Currently, we have limited resources to help these youth get on their feet. Additional cuts will be devastating. Emancipating Youth Stipends were completely eliminated in the Governor's veto this year. This is one of the programs that provides aged-out and recently emancipated foster youth with much needed educational, job, and housing support. Without these services, many would be unemployed and even homeless.

Pulling the plug on services children and families need doesn't mean their needs will go away. They simply get pushed to a later date and come at a higher cost. Abused and neglected children who do not receive help often become adults who struggle with alcoholism, depression, and disease including obesity, cancer, heart disease and diabetes. Failing to address child abuse costs taxpayers an estimated \$104 billion annually in the form of greater demand for services, according to Prevent Child Abuse America.

California can and must do better for its abused and neglected children. Not just because it's the right thing to do but because caring for them means investing in the safety and security of our communities.

We all share in the responsibility to ensure the well-being of abused and neglected children. We need the Governor and Legislature to commit to protecting our most vulnerable children.

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