

# My Word: Caring for our most vulnerable children

Phillip R. Crandall/For the Times-Standard  
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As Californians wait for the governor's latest version of his 2010-11 state budget, hundreds of foster youth and their advocates -- including a small but mighty group of Humboldt County youth -- are heading to the state Capitol on Wednesday to protest cuts to child welfare services funding.

These include \$133 million in reductions to counties charged with caring for some of the state's most vulnerable citizens: young people who have been removed from their families due to neglect and abuse.

Government has a fundamental legal and moral responsibility to serve and care for foster children, regardless of any budget crisis. These children did not cause this crisis and do not deserve to have services they depend upon eliminated because of it. In fact, foster children and youth should be a priority to the state, to ensure they not only survive, but thrive, despite the circumstances life has handed them.

Studies show that up to 80 percent of foster children suffer mental health issues as a result of the trauma they faced in their homes. In California, only half of foster children graduate from high school, and only 3 percent finish college. More than 50 percent become unemployed or homeless once they reach age 18 and are removed from the foster care system.

These young people should be cared for in the manner we would want for our own children if for some reason we were unable to care for them ourselves. We must ensure they have access to a loving foster home or adoption, to medical care and mental health services, to a good public education and any other supports that provide an equal opportunity for a bright future.

Faced with increased risk of poverty, homelessness, incarceration and suicide, they deserve to be first in line for government support, not last. As we travel to Sacramento this week, this is the message we'll carry with us.

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