

AB 1929 (Rubio) Child Abuse and Neglect Reporting Child Abuse Reporting Electronic System (CARES)

Bill Summary

AB 1929 would continue ongoing authority to operate Internet-based child abuse and neglect reporting systems established by Senate Bill 478 (Chapter 490, Statutes of 2015) and expand its use to all mandated reporters.

Existing Law

SB 478 authorizes certain county child welfare agencies, until January 1, 2021, to develop and implement a pilot program for Internet-based reporting of child abuse and neglect and mandates the evaluation of outcome measures to determine the effectiveness of the program.

The Problem

The number of child abuse calls made to the Los Angeles County Child Protection Hotline (CPH) has continually increased. The CPH received 225,937 calls in 2018 compared to 186,781 calls received ten years prior in 2009, an additional 39,156 calls. The following factors have contributed to a 23.6% increase in call volume in the last ten years:

- Increased awareness of reporting mandates
- Media coverage of child abuse and child fatalities
- Media coverage of family violence
- Passage of Senate Bill 39 in 2008 requiring the release of child fatality records
- New populations of children who are now the subjects of suspected child abuse and neglect reports such as non-minor dependent and former foster youth, Commercially Sexually Exploited Children, and Foreign-born children and youth crossing our U.S. borders in hopes of refuge.

Although the CPH is fully staffed by the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS), there are times when calls in the queue are on hold for exceedingly long times. Each of these calls requires a social worker to calm the caller and gather sensitive information, as well as assess the details regarding suspected child abuse or neglect. Each call requires 20 to 30 minutes on average to complete. Documentation in the statewide Child Welfare Services/Case Management System requires another hour to hour and a half to generate a referral. The standard is for each social worker to handle one call per hour, which is consistent with other child abuse hotlines across the State of California.

Background

Los Angeles is the only county within California to opt to participate in the Internet Based Reporting Pilot. The Child Abuse Reporting Electronic System (CARES) was designed and developed internally by DCFS and implemented in 2017.

CARES is accessible to specified mandated reporters and includes a standardized safety assessment of qualifying questions and excludes the submission of emergent reports where the child is subject to immediate risk of abuse, neglect, exploitation, or is in imminent danger of severe harm or death. As required by statute, an independent evaluator monitored implementation to determine the effectiveness, validity in assessing safety, and the overall quality of service over the duration of the pilot program.

The CARES online reporting system has exceeded expectations. In 2019, over 5,900 online reports to CARES were submitted (primarily by school personnel) – in comparison to 1,838 online reports in 2018 – a 322% increase. Online reporting through CARES fulfills the County’s mission to provide effective and caring services. DCFS has found that allowing mandated reporters to make non-urgent child abuse reports through the online portal, rather than expend their valuable time on hold to make a verbal report, has been a tremendous improvement in efficiency for both mandated reporters and the child welfare agency. Ongoing authorization to operate the system is necessary to maintain and build on the efficiencies that have resulted from CARES. Further, it would continue to extend the option to other counties to implement an online reporting system and experience positive results similar to those in Los Angeles County.

Bill Summary

AB 1929 would eliminate the sunset date of January 1, 2021 included in SB 478 and permanently authorize the operation of the online child abuse reporting system, as well as permit all mandated reporters to utilize the system in order to better protect children.

Support

Los Angeles County (Co-Sponsor)
Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department (Co-Sponsor)
County Welfare Directors Association (Co-Sponsor)

For More Information

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