



May 16, 2014

The Honorable Ellen Corbett, Chair
Senate Budget Subcommittee #3



Honorable Members
Senate Budget Subcommittee #3
State Capitol Building, Room 5019
Sacramento, CA 958014

RE: Foster Parent and Kinship Recruitment, Retention and Support



Dear Chair Corbett and Members:

The undersigned agencies and organizations strongly urge your support to provide \$6.75 million General Fund to establish a Foster Parent and Kinship Recruitment, Retention and Support fund for county child welfare agencies. The fund would be dedicated to the recruitment, retention and support of relative caregivers and licensed foster parents so that they may provide permanent, stable, loving homes for children in the foster care system.



County child welfare agencies protect and serve over 53,000 children who have been removed from their homes due to abuse and neglect through the State foster care system. These agencies are required by law to first consider placement with relatives and if unavailable, next with licensed foster parents. Family caregivers help foster children overcome their abuse and trauma in a supportive environment. Relatives help the foster child maintain connection with their family and community, and often are able to maintain sibling groups together while in care. Relatives and licensed foster parents often provide a permanent home through adoption or guardianship when foster children cannot safely return home.

CHILDREN NOW



California Alliance
OF CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES

Although foster care caseloads have dropped by nearly 40% since 2003, the loss of county licensed foster care homes has outpaced this decline. Specifically, between 2003 and 2013, counties have lost over 50% of its licensed foster family homes, while our reliance on relatives for placements has increased slightly over this time, with 36% of all children now placed with relative caregivers. These relatives often care for their related foster children on a moment's notice and are ill-prepared for the task of fostering.



Lack of adequate supports for both kin and licensed foster parents discourages new families from fostering and hurts counties' ability to recruit and retain high quality caregivers. Without adequate supports, these foster caregivers can easily become overwhelmed with their caregiving responsibilities, which can lead to placement disruptions and other poor outcomes for foster children, including placements into institutional placement settings such as group homes, which are much more costly for tax payers and less desirable for children.



The proposed funding augmentation of \$6.75 million State General Funds will provide much needed supports for foster and kin caregivers, and importantly for the children in their care. Specifically, the funding would enable counties to address local needs through the following activities:

Targeted recruitment efforts: Counties need a deep and broad pool of foster families so that foster children can be matched to families who can meet their unique needs, for example, some foster parents prefer older youth or sibling groups, while some prefer to mentor and support an LGBTQ foster youth. Targeted recruitment will help improve foster youth outcomes as a result of better matching between foster families and foster children. Foster parents can also serve as ambassadors to assist in targeted recruitment efforts with county staff.

Direct Services and Supports to Foster and Kin Caregivers: Examples of services often requested by foster parents and kin caregivers include respite care, additional training, support to participate in team-based meetings concerning children in their care, and covering one-time expenses such purchasing an extra bed. In addition, this fund can assist foster parents and kin caregivers to pay for activities that will help “normalize” a child’s experience in the foster care system (e.g. participation in school-based activities). Finally, these funds can be used to supplement existing rates for short-term stays to avoid placement into an institutional setting such as a shelter or group home.

Staffing Support: It is important to have dedicated support to provide individualized assistance to caregivers and to address programmatic issues that may deter foster parents and relative caregivers. Some examples include staffing “warm lines” to answer questions about child-specific caregiving issues, creating local policies to promote partnerships and information sharing with foster caregivers about the child’s care needs, and mentoring and coaching to meet children’s special needs.

Foster parents often cite both inadequate reimbursement rates and the lack of supportive services as critical factors in deciding whether or not to serve as a foster parent. Clearly, current levels of support to recruit and retain foster and kin caregivers are inadequate. For relative caregivers who are caring for a non-federally eligible child, the problem is exacerbated as these relatives can only qualify for a CalWORKs child-only grant. While it is true that a small increase in reimbursement rates to these caregivers can help, there is still a need for other supports and services that may benefit all licensed foster and relative caregivers directly, and thus a need for this augmentation.

Our Coalition strongly supports additional funding to help recruit, retain and support family caregivers who can provide stable, loving homes for foster children. We thank you for your consideration of our request and for your continued support of the State’s foster children.

Sincerely,

Frank J. Mecca, Executive Director
County Welfare Directors Association of
California

Susanna Kniffen, Associate Director, Child
Welfare Policy
Children NOW

Patricia Nagis, President
California State Foster Parent Association

Tia Orr, Senior Government Advocate
Service Employees Union International (SEIU)

Kelly Brooks-Lindsey, Senior Legislative
Representative, Health and Human Services
California State Association of Counties

Jolena Voorhis, Executive Director
Urban Counties Caucus

Angie Schwartz, Policy Director
Alliance for Children's Rights

Jennifer Rodriguez, Executive Director
Youth Law Center

Carroll Schroeder, Executive Director
California Alliance of Child and Family
Services

Attachments: Support List and Fact Sheet

cc: Les Spahn, Office of Assemblymember Roger Dickinson
Jackie Wong, Office of President Pro Tem Steinberg
Samantha Lui, Consultant, Senate Budget and Fiscal Review Committee, Sub.3
Chantele Denny, Republican Consultant, Senate Budget & Fiscal Review Committee
Mike Wilkening, Health and Human Services Agency
Matt Paulin, Program Budget Manager, HHS, Department of Finance
Mark Newton, Deputy Legislative Analyst, Health & Human Services, LAO
Ginni Bella, Legislative Analyst's Office
Will Lightbourne, Director, Department of Social Services
Patricia Huston, Legislative Affairs, Department of Social Services
Kelly Brooks Lindsey, California State Association of Counties
County Caucus



Foster Parent and Kinship Care Recruitment, Retention and Support Coalition Support List

Updated 5/16/2014

County Welfare Directors Association of California (sponsor)
Alameda County Social Services Agency
Alliance of Children's Rights
Butte County Department of Employment and Social Services
Calaveras County Health and Human Services Agency
California Alliance of Child and Family Services
California State Association of Counties (CSAC)
California State Foster Parent Association
California Youth Connection
Children NOW
City and County of San Francisco
Contra Costa County Employment and Human Services Department
County of Orange
El Dorado Foster Parent Association (Branch 35)
Fostering Friends Support Group
Humboldt County Department of Health and Human Services
Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors
Madera County Department of Social Services
Napa County Board of Supervisors
Napa County Family and Foster Care Association
Riverside County Department of Public Social Services
Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors
Service Employees Union International (SEIU)
Tehama County Department of Social Services
Urban Counties Caucus
Ventura County Board of Supervisors
Woodland Community College Foster and Kinship Care Education
Yolo County Foster Family Association
Youth Law Center
Cherie Schroeder and Ken Schroeder, Jr., Yolo County Non-Relative Extended Family Caregivers



CWDA

BUDGET FACT SHEET
Foster Parent Recruitment, Retention and Support

Prepared by the County Welfare Directors Association of California (CWDA)

Purpose:

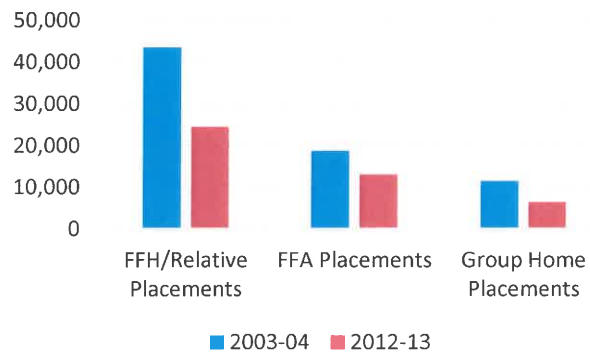
California’s child welfare agencies protect and serve over 53,000 children who have been removed from their homes due to abuse and neglect through the state’s foster care system. Whenever possible, foster children are placed with relatives or other family-based environment capable of meeting the child’s needs. Unfortunately, the lack of adequate supports for our kinship and licensed foster parents discourages new families from fostering and hurts counties’ ability to recruit and retain high quality caregivers.

Background:

When children are placed into foster care due to abuse and neglect, counties are mandated by federal and state law to first consider placement with relatives, and when a relative placement cannot be found, state law requires that we consider county licensed foster homes as the next priority for placement. Unfortunately counties have seen a steady decline in the number of licensed foster family homes since 2003.

Although foster care caseloads have dropped by 40% since 2003, the loss of relative homes and county licensed foster care homes has outpaced the reduction in foster care caseloads. Specifically, the number of children placed into licensed foster family homes (FFH) and group homes both declined by 44%. Meanwhile, placements with foster family agencies (FFAs), which are private, non-profit agencies that receive funding to recruit, certify, train and support their foster parents, has seen a much smaller decline (30% since 2003).

Placement Changes FY 2003-04
to 2012-13



Federal and state policies prioritize placements with relatives and county licensed foster parents yet these family caregivers receive the least amount of support to care for abused and neglected children. County-approved relatives and licensed foster parents receive a board and care payment that covers the basic costs of caring for a child including: housing, food, clothing, and other ancillary costs. Some families may qualify for a supplement if the child has behavioral or medical needs. Support to these kin and foster parents is very limited, even though they typically care for the same children with complex trauma, medical and other needs as those served in foster family agencies and group homes.

Greater Supports Will Improve Child Outcomes:

Dedicated funding for recruitment, retention and support of foster parents is woefully inadequate and has been stagnant for over a decade. Only \$3.1 million (total funds) is available statewide for kin caregiver and county licensed foster parent support. Research and experience have shown that lack of caregiver support significantly contributes to caregiver turnover. With turnover, foster children are more likely to experience placement disruptions and are less likely to achieve desired outcomes of adoption or guardianship with a permanent family.

Research also shows that increased support to relatives and foster caregivers can improve outcomes for children in the foster care system. Many promising and effective strategies exist to recruit and retain these loving families. Some examples include: targeted recruitment in communities so that foster children have continuity with their schools and communities, having foster parents and relatives serve as ambassadors for recruitment and peer support, offering coaching and mentoring to foster parents, supporting foster parent participation in team decision-making meetings, and providing respite care.

In addition, foster parents are expected to “normalize” the foster child’s experience by supporting the child’s participation in extra-curricular activities, such as sports and dances, which are not currently factored into the foster care rate. Older youth in particular incur additional expenses such as graduation pictures, school projects, test fees, and other activities as they prepare for emancipation. For very young children, the added costs of diapers and wipes, infant formula, and clothing can strain a family’s budget. For children just entering care, foster parent recruitment is critical to ensure there are adequate emergency placement beds to immediately place children who must be removed into temporary homes while the child is assessed and the child can be matched to the most appropriate home.

Proposed Solution:

Increase support for kinship and foster parent recruitment, retention and support by \$13.5 million total funds (\$6.75m GF). These funds would provide direct support to foster children placed with kin caregivers and foster parents and would increase child well-being through participation in normalizing activities for youth in care. The proposal would also reduce reliance on shelter and other institutional care settings through increased availability of emergency foster home beds.

For More Information:

Frank J. Mecca, Executive Director
(916) 443-1749, fmecca@cwda.org

Libby Reiter Sanchez
CWDA Legislative Consultant
(916) 213-1440, sanchezadvocacy@gmail.com