



March 4, 2019

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

Honorable Members
Assembly Budget Subcommittee No. 1

From: Justin Garrett, Legislative Representative, California State Association of
Counties
Frank J. Mecca, Executive Director, County Welfare Directors Association

RE: CONTINUUM OF CARE REFORM – RESOURCE FAMILY
APPROVAL AND CANS ASSESSMENTS

The California State Association of Counties (CSAC) and County Welfare Directors Association of California (CWDA) oppose the proposed cut to county child welfare agencies for the implementation of the state-mandated Resource Family Approval (RFA) process. We urge you to restore \$24.4 million State General Fund (SGF) so that county child welfare agencies may continue to expeditiously approve resource families to care for children and youth in the foster care system due to abuse, neglect and exploitation. We also urge consideration of budget or trailer bill language related to the Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths (CANS) Assessment.

Resource Family Approval (RFA)

Under the Continuum of Care Reform (CCR) enacted through passage of AB 403 (Statutes of 2015), all counties were required to implement a streamlined, child-focused and family-friendly process that combined relative approval, foster care licensing, and adoption home studies into a single, unified process. This process, known as RFA, eliminated redundancies between the three separate processes, which were often confusing for prospective caregivers. Under RFA, all caregivers are treated equally and supported up-front to ensure they feel adequately prepared for the important job of caring for our state's abused, neglected and exploited children and youth. Under RFA, all caregivers are required to receive pre-approval training on trauma-informed care, must pass extensive criminal background checks, a home inspection, and are further vetted through a family assessment process.

The goals of RFA align with, and support, CCR's vision of placing foster children into home-based settings with loving family caregivers. Counties have seen positive outcomes in the short time that RFA has been in effect statewide (since January 2017). For example, the training that all resource parents receive, especially relatives, has helped them feel more prepared and have a better understanding of the needs of the children and youth in their care. RFA allows relatives to foster other, non-related foster children, and many have opted to open their hearts and their homes to additional foster children served by both the child welfare and probation agencies. This has helped counties to increase their capacity of family-based care, which is a central tenet of CCR. RFA also promotes permanency by helping to better match foster children and youth to caregivers and preparing resource parents for the possibility of becoming a permanent family for the children in their care. In this regard, many counties report they are seeing faster times to permanency including adoptions as a result of RFA.

Without adequate funding for RFA, county child welfare agencies will be unable to meet the mandate to approve relatives and non-related extended family members (NREFMs) within 90 days of placement of a child or foster care in an emergency situation. Under current law passed last year by the Legislature, these relatives and NREFMs may receive payment for up to 180 days in FY 2018-19, but in FY 2019-20, payment can be provided only up to the first 90 days, after which time, these relatives and NREFMs would be without funding to meet the daily care needs of the foster child or youth in their care.

As the LAO notes in its analysis of the Governor's budget proposal, a critical first step in reducing use of congregate care is to ensure timely approvals of resource families, and any delays in approvals are likely to have a negative impact on resource families and contribute to higher state-level costs for CCR. The RFA process has incurred unexpected delays resulting in approvals taking over 90 days. Counties have focused significant local resources to reduce backlogs of applications and reduce time to approval. Although processing time has somewhat improved, this remains a work in progress. Cutting funding at the very moment that counties are working diligently to improve the RFA process will undermine these efforts.

Foster Parent Recruitment, Retention and Support Funding

County agencies have been able to support family-based care through implementation of RFA, as well as use of Foster Parent Recruitment, Retention and Support (FPRRS) funding. The RFA process, in combination with FPRRS-supported activities, has greatly enhanced counties' ability to meet the vision of CCR and reduce use of congregate care. Early results are promising: statewide, there were 870 fewer placements into congregate care between 2016 and 2018, a 16% reduction. FPRRS funds numerous activities designed to identify and support resource families to care for foster children, including intensive family finding,

trauma-informed training and coaching for caregivers, respite care, and foster parent mentors. Unfortunately, FPRRS funding is proposed to be completely eliminated in FY 2019-20. With FPRRS completely eliminated, and RFA significantly reduced, counties' ability to meet the CCR's goals are unlikely to materialize.

Please refer to our Coalition letter concerning our request to continue FPRRS funding.

Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths (CANS)

The proposed budget includes \$9.8 million SGF on a one-time basis for counties to implement the CANS assessment. The CANS tool supports the Child and Family Team (CFT) in identifying how well a child/youth is functioning across several domains, so that the CFT can more readily identify areas for needed focus and support, as well as determine if the child is improving based on the services and supports provided through the team.

We are supportive of the implementation of the CANS assessment and appreciate this one-time funding. However, given this is a new assessment tool, and the counties and State continue to test and refine implementation, we respectfully request that the Legislature adopt budget bill or trailer bill language to track actual expenditures to inform future budgeting of this work.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

cc: Gail Gronert, Office of the Assembly Speaker
Jason Sisney, Office of the Assembly Speaker
Nicole Vazquez, Assembly Budget Subcommittee No. 1
Cyndi Hillery, Assembly Republican Fiscal Office
Marla Cowan, Office of Assembly Member Joaquin Arambula
Richard Figueroa, Office of Governor Gavin Newsom
Tam Ma, Office of Governor Gavin Newsom
Mark Newton, Legislative Analyst's Office
Ginni Bella Navarre, Legislative Analyst's Office
Marko Mijic, Health and Human Services Agency
Paula Villescaz, Health and Human Services Agency
Pat Leary, California Department of Social Services
Robert Smith, California Department of Social Services
Kären Dickerson, California Department of Social Services
Adam Dorsey, HHS, Department of Finance
Jay Kapoor, HHS, Department of Finance
County Caucus