[County letterhead]

Date

The Honorable Angelique Ashby

California State Senate

1021 O Street, Suite 7320

Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: **SB 408:** **CHILD WELFARE: SERVICES FOR FOSTER YOUTH WITH COMPLEX NEEDS (As Amended March 14, 2023)—SUPPORT**

Dear Senator Ashby:

The County of XXX [or agency] is pleased to support your bill, SB 408, co-sponsored by the County Welfare Directors Association of California (CWDA) and Chief Probation Offices of California (CPOC), to establish programs and services to support foster youth and youth at risk of foster care with significant trauma and complex needs. This investment is needed to ensure no youth are left behind in California’s continuing effort to implement Continuum of Care Reform (CCR).

Our county has embraced the goals of the Continuum of Care Reform (CCR), implemented through AB 403 (Stone, Ch. 773, Statutes of 2015), to reduce the use of congregate care and improve permanency and other outcomes for foster youth. CCR has resulted in profound shifts in child welfare practice and has helped to improve outcomes for many – but not all - children, youth and families. Improvements in practices include the use of child and family teaming to ensure youth and family voice in case management and placement decisions, statewide use of the Resource Family Approval process to align and streamline licensing and approval for families, increases in foster care rates, and use of a universal child strengths and needs assessment tool. CCR resulted in significant reductions in the use of congregate care and a greater focus on supporting children and youth in family-based settings.

However, CCR was not designed to serve some of our foster youth who have experienced severe trauma and/or have complex physical, behavioral and other needs. [Counties please add any county-specific information if possible and to the extent you feel comfortable. Highlight the complexity of youth needs across systems and inability of providers to meet all those needs, resulting in multiple placements, longer lengths of stay in shelters and/or stays in unlicensed settings for a small portion of youth.]

Our county child welfare agency collaborates diligently with our system partners – mental health plans, care providers, regional centers, educational agencies, etc., – to care for youth with severe trauma and/or complex care needs, but challenges remain. Higher-level treatment services are not always available at the moment they are needed, and providers are not always able to offer the intensive care needed by some youth. As a result, these youth often experience multiple placement disruptions and hospitalizations, and sometimes stay in unlicensed settings, while social workers seek other appropriate services and treatment settings. Unfortunately, this further exacerbates a youth’s trauma and is likely to lead to poor outcomes.

For these reasons, we are in support of SB 408, which would establish an enhanced STRTP model providing intensive, on-site services to stabilize, assess, and provide therapeutic supports to the subset of foster youth with particularly significant needs, and deliver 6 months of after care to both youth and their caregivers. This ensures continuity of services and supported transitions to family-based care or into other residential care settings that we hope will prevent future disruptions and undesired outcomes, such as hospitalizations.

Additionally, we support the proposal to establish up to ten regional health teams across the state to improve assessments and timely access to needed services (physical, mental health, substance use, etc.), perform comprehensive case management in coordination with other child-serving systems, and ensure appropriate follow-up to prevent placement disruptions with families and care coordination for youth stepping down from hospitals or other settings. This approach is critical to preserving families, preventing disruptions in family-based foster care, and identifying and supporting families as early as possible to reduce trauma.

Finally, we support converting one-time funds provided to counties into an on-going appropriation of funding from the State Department of Social Services to build and sustain complex care programs and practices. We also support the bill’s streamlining of this funding to meet child-specific needs so that we can more immediately serve children, youth and families with complex needs.

SB 408 will help county child welfare agencies like ours preserve families and improve services to our youth with significant trauma and/or complex needs. Thank you for carrying this important measure.

Sincerely,

*Name*

*Title*

cc: Amanda Kirchner, County Welfare Directors Association