



CHILDREN NOW

February 25, 2019

Honorable Richard Pan, Chair
Senate Budget & Fiscal Review Sub. No. 3
State Capitol, Room 5019
Sacramento, CA 95814

Honorable Joaquin Arambula, Chair
Assembly Budget Subcommittee No. 1
State Capitol, Room 6026
Sacramento, CA 95814

**Re: Continued Funding to Recruit, Retain and Support Resource Families-
Request Additional \$43.2 million State General Funds**

Dear Senator Pan and Assemblymember Arambula,

On behalf of the Alliance for Children's Rights, California Alliance of Caregivers, Children NOW, California State Association of Counties, County Welfare Directors Association of California (CWDA) and Chief Probation Officers of California (CPOC), we respectfully urge the Human Services Budget Subcommittees to provide \$43.2 million State General Fund (SGF) to maintain critical supports to resource family caregivers, and the children and youth in their care.

Achieving the vision of the Continuum of Care Reform (CCR) requires recruiting and retaining resource families to support the foster children and youth served by child welfare and probation agencies. Before this investment, California struggled to maintain, and recruit, additional resource parents without added supports desired and needed by those families. In 2015, the Legislature recognized the need to invest in families by establishing the Foster Parent Recruitment, Retention and Support Fund. The initial funding of \$17.2 million SGF began January 1, 2016 as a pre-cursor to CCR implementation, and increased to \$43.3 million by 2016-17 and 2017-18, leveraging an additional \$11.5 million federal dollars per year. Unfortunately, the Fund was cut to \$23.6 million SGF in FY 2018-19 and is proposed for elimination in FY 2019-20, despite the fact that CCR reform activities are not yet complete. This jeopardizes the progress that child welfare and probation agencies have made in reducing the use of congregate care and achieving permanency for our foster children and youth.

In many counties, stakeholder input was gathered from caregivers to build very successful retention and recruitment programs. The Fund has successfully established new supports that resource families now rely upon. New recruitment and retention programs are just starting to yield results. The progress made in many counties will be greatly undermined at this critical time of CCR implementation if funding is decreased

Successful recruitment and retention activities include:

- Caregiver Support Social Workers and Caregiver Parent Liaisons to provide support and to connect caregivers with resources - lightening the burden on social workers.
- Foster Parent Mentors to provide extra support for relatives through the Resource Family Approval (RFA) process, and for new caregivers when a foster child is first placed into their home.
- Trauma-informed, pre-approval training for all relative caregivers as now required under the Resource Family Approval (RFA) process.
- Child Care and Respite Programs to assist caregivers in attending trainings, meetings and appointments, and to prevent caregiver burnout.
- Foster Parent Support Groups to help caregivers access resources and process their experiences and challenges.
- Intensive Family Finding and Child/Youth-Specific Recruitment to identify extended family and find the right family for each child.
- Trauma-informed, in-home coaching and training using trained clinicians to build skills in families that preserve the family unit and allow for continued healing.

In many instances, counties have been able to place sibling groups and children and youth with complex needs into homes that would otherwise not have been possible without the added support of social workers, caregiver mentors, and the tangible items provided by this Fund. Placement disruptions have been avoided through the use of caregiver mentors, respite care, and trauma-informed training. Many foster children and youth have found permanency through guardianship or adoption as a result. Counties have been able to reduce use of their emergency shelters. Some examples of these many positive outcomes described in the Attachment.

CCR continues to be a work in progress. Last year, the Legislature approved a one-year extension for group homes to convert to Short-Term Licensed Residential Treatment Program (STRTPs) in response to unanticipated implementation delays. Unfortunately, many facilities are still undergoing the licensing conversion process and lack the necessary array of services needed to transition foster youth into family

homes. This Fund is critical to supporting that transition into family-based care. Many group homes will also not be converting, resulting in a loss of capacity, and therefore it is also critical to support foster children/youth with their caregivers to avert the need for placement into congregate care.

Our Coalition urges full funding of \$43.2 million SGF to county child welfare and probation agencies to continue to build the capacity of resource caregivers to provide a loving and healing environment for foster children and youth. Our Coalition is also in process of finalizing proposed statutory changes to focus activities on best practices that have been found effective in recruiting and retaining families and to promote transparency in the use of these funds.

Thank you for your consideration of our request.

Sincerely,

Angie Schwartz, Policy Director, Alliance for Children's Rights

Jennifer Rexroad, Executive Director, California Alliance of Caregivers

Susanna Kniffen, Senior Director, Child Welfare Policy, Children NOW

Justin Garrett, Legislative Representative, California State Association of Counties

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

Danielle Sanchez, Legislative Director, Chief Probation Officers of California

Attachment: Success Stories

cc: Members and Staff of the Senate Budget Subcommittee No. 3
Members and Staff of the Assembly Budget Subcommittee No.1
Mareva Brown, Office of the Senate President Pro Tempore
Chris Woods, Office of the Senate President Pro Tempore
Gail Gronert, Office of the Assembly Speaker
Jason Sisney, Office of the Assembly Speaker
Renita Polk, Senate Budget and Fiscal Review Subcommittee No. 3
Nicole Vazquez, Assembly Budget Subcommittee No. 1
Rebecca Hamilton, Senate Republican Fiscal Office
Cyndi Hillery, Assembly Republican Fiscal Office
Luan Huynh, Office of Senator Holly Mitchell
Bernadette Lawrence, Office of Senator Richard Pan
Marla Cowan, Office of Assembly Member Joaquin Arambula
Mark Newton, Legislative Analyst's Office
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Pat Leary, California Department of Social Services
Robert Smith, California Department of Social Services
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Jay Kapoor, HHS, Department of Finance
County Caucus