



March 17, 2015

The Honorable Tony Thurmond, Chair  
Assembly Budget Subcommittee #1



Honorable Members  
Assembly Budget Subcommittee #1  
State Capitol Building, Room 6026  
Sacramento, CA 958014



**RE: Foster Parent and Kinship Recruitment, Retention and Support**

Dear Chair Thurmond and Members:

The undersigned agencies and organizations strongly urge your support to provide \$30.2 million General Fund for Foster Parent and Kinship Recruitment, Retention and Support. This investment aligns with the Continuum of Care Reform (CCR) recommendations to increase the number of high quality foster family homes and relatives who can provide so that they may provide permanent, stable, loving homes for children in the foster care system.

County child welfare agencies protect and serve over 63,000 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.

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.

CHILDREN NOW



The proposed funding augmentation of \$30.2 million 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, child care, additional training, support to participate in team-based meetings concerning children in their care, and covering one-time expenses such as 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.

**Intensive Relative Search and Engagement:** Research shows that children in foster care benefit from placements that provide continuity to family, and relative caregivers are often able to take sibling groups, thus preventing their separation. Statewide, approximately 35% of foster placements occur with relatives. With additional searching, engagement and in-home support, we can avert placements into group homes and these relatives can provide a permanent, loving home through adoption or guardianship.

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 CA

Amy Lemley, Policy Director  
John Burton Foundation

Farrah McDaid-Ting, Legislative  
Representative, Health and Human Services  
California State Association of Counties

Susanna Kniffen, Associate Director,  
Child Welfare Policy  
Children NOW

Angie Schwartz, Policy Director  
Alliance for Children’s Rights

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

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

Rebecca Gonzales, Director of Government  
Relations and Political Affairs  
National Association of Social Workers,  
California Chapter

Budget Memo – Foster Parent Recruitment, Retention & Support  
March 17, 2015  
Page 3

Attachment: Fact Sheet

cc: Gail Gronert, Office of the Assembly Speaker  
Chris Woods, Office of the Assembly Speaker  
Nicole Vazquez, Assembly Budget Subcommittee No. 1  
Julie Souliere, Assembly Republican Fiscal Consultant  
Michael Wilkening, Health and Human Services Agency  
Jay Kapoor, Department of Finance  
Matt Paulin, Department of Finance  
Mark Newton, Legislative Analyst's Office  
Will Lightbourne, Director, Department of Social Services  
Patricia Huston, Legislative Affairs, Department of Social Services  
Farrah McDaid-Ting, California State Association of Counties  
County Caucus