



CWDA

March 13, 2015

To: The Honorable Tony Thurmond, Chair
Assembly Budget Subcommittee No. 1

Honorable Members, Assembly Budget Subcommittee No. 1

From: Frank J. Mecca, Executive Director

RE: **Child Welfare Services: Continuum of Care Reform—Foster
and Kinship Care Recruitment, Retention and Support**

The County Welfare Directors Association of California (CWDA) appreciates the proposal by the Administration to increase foster care recruitment, retention and support funding by \$2.8 million General Fund in conjunction with its Continuum of Care Reform (CCR) recommendations. CWDA agrees an investment in foster homes and relative caregivers is a necessary step towards the goal of reducing use of group homes. However, we believe that additional funding is needed to ensure an adequate supply of high quality foster families and relative caregivers and for this reason, CWDA, respectfully requests your support for \$30.2 million increase to support county Foster Parent and Kinship Care Recruitment, Retention and Support activities.

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's foster care system. CWS is required by law to first consider placement with relatives and if unavailable, next with licensed foster parents. These family caregivers help foster children overcome their abuse and trauma in a supportive environment. Relatives receive the highest priority for placement to help the foster child maintain connection with their family and community. 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 relative homes and 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. Lack of adequate supports for relatives 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 institutions such as group homes, which are much more costly for tax payers and less desirable for children.

Only \$2.5 million State General Funds (\$4.2 million total funds) were allocated to counties for foster parent recruitment, retention and support activities prior to realignment of the child welfare and foster care programs in 2011. The Administration proposes to increase this level by \$2.8 million State General Funds to support its CCR effort. While appreciated, this proposed level is woefully insufficient to fulfill the CCR recommendations to serve more foster youth through home-based settings and to enable children to receive supports and services without having to rotate into other placements, such as group homes, to receive services. Specifically, the CCR Report acknowledges the importance of foster parents as active partners with child welfare workers and service providers and integral members of the child and family team. The report also recommends assessing and matching children with foster parents based on a robust assessment process, and training of these home-based caregivers aligned. Unfortunately,

without an adequate supply of foster families for matching, and without support to the caregiver to participate in trainings and on the child and family teams, this well-intentioned reform effort is likely to fail.

An up-front investment into recruitment, retention and supports for foster and kin caregivers, and importantly for the children in their care, is critical to the success of the CCR effort. The proposed \$30.2 million investment would enable counties to support foster caregivers and foster youth in the following ways:

Targeted recruitment and support efforts: Counties strive to keep children connected to their community to minimize trauma for children coming into care. In addition, counties are required by federal and state law to maintain foster children in their schools of origin when it is in the best interests of the child. 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, and mentors to other foster caregivers.

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, 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 in emergency foster homes to avoid placement into an institutional setting such as a shelter or group home.

Intensive Family Finding, Engagement and Support: Relatives often step in on a moment’s notice to care for foster children upon removal from their homes. Relatives are also most likely to care for sibling groups, which helps to minimize further trauma upon removal from the home. Yet they receive very little training or support to care for foster children. These funds can be utilized to provide training to relative caregivers consistent with the training currently provided to other foster caregivers, and individualized support through mentorship, care coordination, in-home counseling, and assistance with accessing additional services.

We thank you for your consideration of this important matter and we look forward to working with you to support our foster parents and relative caregivers of the State’s foster children.

Attachment: CWDA Foster Parent and Kinship Care Support Fact Sheet

CWDA Budget Memo – Foster and Kinship Care Support
March 13, 2015
Page Three

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