



CHILDREN NOW



cbhda

March 1, 2019

The Honorable Richard Pan, Chair
Senate Budget & Fiscal Review Sub. 3
State Capitol, Room 5019
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Joaquin Arambula, Chair
Assembly Budget Subcommittee 1
State Capitol, Room 6026
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: CHILD WELFARE SERVICES: Family Urgent Response System – SUPPORT

Dear Senator Pan and Assembly Member Arambula,

We are writing in support of the Family Urgent Response System, a \$15 million State General Fund (SGF) budget proposal in 2019-20 and \$30 million SGF ongoing, to support foster youth and their caregivers and strengthen their relationships. The purpose of this Response System is to provide foster youth and their caregivers with the immediate trauma-informed support they need when issues arise, in order to preserve the family unit and link youth and families to longer-term, community-based supports and services needed to support them and foster a healing environment. This Response System supports the goals of the Continuum of Care Reform (CCR) to provide timely, in-home supports and services to help families thrive.

Children and youth in the foster care system have been removed from their homes and placed in new environments with caregivers that are often unfamiliar to them. Adapting to a new home can be challenging, especially for youth who are struggling to process their entry into foster care and can make bonding difficult. As a result of their maltreatment, trauma, and loss, both children and youth in foster care and their caregivers may not be equipped with the skills and knowledge that will allow them to adapt to their new living situation. Children, youth and caregivers may quickly feel alone, confused and overwhelmed. This threatens the family unit and presents a barrier to providing loving care for traumatized youth. A placement disruption would have profound, negative consequences for the child or youth, resulting in feelings of abandonment and deepening the trauma. Moreover, in critical moments, caregivers may contact law enforcement because they lack other, more appropriate options for immediate help, resulting in the inappropriate criminalization of traumatized youth.

The Family Urgent Response System would provide current and former foster youth and their caregivers with immediate supports, by: (1) establishing a statewide hotline available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, for caregivers and youth who are experiencing emotional, behavior or other difficulties and need immediate help. The hotline will be staffed with operators who are trained in conflict resolution and de-escalation and can provide immediate assistance to preserve the family unit and determine whether mobile, in-home support is needed; and (2) requiring counties to establish mobile response teams to provide face-to-face, in-home response on a 24/7 basis to help stabilize the living situation, assess the caregiver's and child's needs, and develop a plan of action. Counties will then link the family with ongoing services through the existing local network of care.

CCR envisions that all foster youth and caregivers receive immediate and timely supports and services regardless of the placement setting, to support long-term permanency and improved outcomes. The Family Urgent Response System for current and former foster youth and their caregivers provides these needed services to help keep families together and to promote a healing environment that allows children, youth and families to grow and thrive. Importantly, the Response System will reduce the likelihood of re-traumatization of children and youth, reduce law enforcement calls and needless criminalization of youth, and prevent placement disruption.

For these reasons, we support the Family Urgent Response System.

Sincerely,

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

Thomas Renfree, Interim Executive Director, County Behavioral Health Directors Association of California

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

Tia Orr, Director of Governmental Affairs, Service Employees International Union - California

cc: Members and Staff of the Senate Budget Subcommittee No. 3
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