



**CWDA**

Advancing Human Services  
for the Welfare of All Californians

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**TO:** County Welfare Directors Association

**FROM:** Tom Joseph, Director, CWDA Washington, D.C. Office

**DATE:** March 8, 2016

**RE:** Federal Update

The House is in recess this week and the Senate is working on completing a bill to address the opioid epidemic. Movement has been slow on both human services policy proposals and the fiscal year (FY) 2017 budget.

**Child Welfare Reform:** Action remains stalled on the bipartisan Families First Act. The yet-to-be introduced Senate measure has been sent to the Congressional Budget Office a number of times to receive estimates of the costs of the bill. Co-authored by Senate Finance Committee Chair Orrin Hatch (R-UT) and Ranking Minority Ron Wyden (D-OR), the legislation would provide a federal entitlement match under Title IV-E for a range of prevention services. The bill also contains congregate care provisions similar to AB 403 with a federal implementation date of October 1, 2019.

During recent Capitol Hill visits with Senate majority and minority staff as well as their House counterparts, it was clear that there has been a good faith effort to compromise on both sides. At this stage, however, Senate Finance Committee Republicans have not been actively calling for a markup of the bill, nor has any of the legislative text been made public. Senate Finance staff indicated that they will soon meet with House Ways and Means staff to review the bill and determine whether there is a bi-cameral, bi-partisan way to proceed. House staff have indicated that they would use the Senate measure as their template.

In related developments, the National Association of Counties adopted a CWDA submitted resolution at its February legislative conference supporting the use of Skype or other electronic media as a means of visiting foster youth over the age of 18 who are residing in a state that has not opted to extend IV-E up to age 21. The proposed change in federal law would help child welfare agencies meet the Promoting Safe and Stable Families Act requirement that 95 percent of the caseload receive monthly in-person visits. The resolution was provided to both Senate and House staff and is attached at the end of this update.

**NEICE Bills Introduced:** The bipartisan *Modernizing the Interstate Placement of Children in Foster Care Act* has been introduced in both the House and the Senate (Rep. Todd Young (R-IN; HR 4472) Senator Charles Grassley (R-IA; S 2574)). The National Electronic Interstate Compact Enterprise (NEICE) was an HHS pilot project developed with the American Public Human Services Association (APHSA) that assisted six states in speeding up interstate

placements by using a web-based information system. Supported by APHSA and the Child Welfare League of America (CWLA), the bills set aside \$5 million for one year through Title VI-B to expand a strategy that helps states speed up the placement of children in foster care, adoptions and kinship care when that placement is in another state.

**Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Reauthorization:** During the National Association of Counties' legislative conference, House Ways and Means Committee staff indicated that they are working to revive bipartisan discussions on a reauthorization bill. A discussion draft was released late last summer, but no action was taken. Staff also noted, however, that the congressional schedule is truncated this year due to the November elections. There are only 13 or so legislative weeks remaining until Congress recesses in October.

The Ways and Means Subcommittee on Human Resources conducted a hearing last week on the role of private sector employers in helping low-income individuals gain employment. It was the first hearing chaired by Rep. Vern Buchanan (R-FL). Rep. Buchanan is one of the wealthiest members of Congress and owns a number of auto dealerships in Florida.

**FY 2017 Budget:** The House has not acted on a budget blueprint for FY 2017. Conservative members of the Republican caucus are pushing for at least \$30 billion in cuts to entitlements such as Medicaid, SNAP and the Social Services Block Grant. In recent years, those cuts have not been considered by the committees of jurisdiction and it is highly unlikely that the committees would do so this year. Consequently, the appropriations committees will likely begin considering the actual appropriations measures using last year's bi-partisan budget agreement. It remains unclear whether Congress will be able to adopt separate spending bills this year, or whether there will again be a massive measure passed at the end of the year combining most of the 12 spending bills into one omnibus bill.

## HUMAN SERVICES AND EDUCATION STEERING COMMITTEE

### Proposed Resolution Supporting Age Appropriate Visitation for Out of State Youth

**Issue:** County child welfare agencies need flexibility in conducting visits with older out-of-county foster youth through computer technology rather than in-person visits.

**Proposed Policy:** The National Association of Counties supports federal legislation to allow child welfare staff to conduct visits through computer technology rather than in-person visits with older (over 18 years of age) youth in extended foster care who are attending college out of state or connecting with relatives.

**Background:** The Promoting Safe and Stable Families Reauthorization Act of 2011 (P.L. 112-34) requires child welfare services workers to make monthly in-person visits with at least 95 percent of the youth in their IV-E foster care caseload. Those states who have extended foster care services to youth up to age 21 cannot establish reciprocal arrangements with the state in which the youth now resides if the receiving state has not opted to extend care to age 21. This means that caseworkers must travel across state lines to conduct the in-person visit.

Since there is no exception to meeting the mandate for older youth placed out of state, the proposed policy would allow alternative means of communicating with those youth via "skype" or other computer technology. This 'age appropriate visitation' alternative could occur on a monthly basis at far less cost, given the significant expense of traveling to meet these youth and the time it takes away from serving other youth on the worker's caseload.

**Fiscal/Urban/Rural Impact:** The proposed policy would reduce county costs of complying with the federal mandate.

**Sponsor:** Cathy Senderling-McDonald, Deputy Executive Director, County Welfare Directors Association of California