



CWDA
Advancing Human Services
for the Welfare of All Californians



URBAN COUNTIES
OF CALIFORNIA



May 18, 2024

To: The Honorable Caroline Menjivar
Chair, Senate Budget Subcommittee No. 3

Honorable Members
Senate Budget Subcommittee No. 3

The Honorable Dr. Corey Jackson
Chair, Assembly Budget Subcommittee No. 2

Honorable Members
Assembly Budget Subcommittee No. 2

RE: OPPOSITION TO CHILD WELFARE CUTS IN THE MAY REVISION

The County Welfare Directors Association (CWDA), the California State Association of Counties (CSAC), the Urban Counties of California (UCC), and the Rural County Representatives of California (RCRC) are *strongly opposed* to the May Revision proposals that would eliminate funding for caregiver approvals and the Family Urgent Response System (FURS) program.

The proposed elimination of funding for caregiver approvals undermines the foundation of our child welfare system, which is to maintain family caregivers for children and youth who have been removed from their parents. This will lead to delays in mandated approvals, including of relative caregivers, and delays in their ability to be provided a full foster care rate payment inclusive of rate supplements. The proposed elimination of FURS will remove vital services proven to stabilize youth and families, leading to placement disruptions and hospitalizations, causing further trauma to foster youth, and contacts with law enforcement which will lead to criminalization of youth's trauma-based reactions. The elimination of FURS will also result in increased costs in other systems including housing, criminal justice, health, and behavioral health.

While the May Revision proposes to reduce and eliminate funding in other programs in Child Welfare Services (CWS), including the elimination of the housing supplement for foster youth in supervised independent living placements (SILP), the elimination of the Housing Navigation and Maintenance Program administered through the Department of Housing and Community Development, and the 40 percent reduction in funding to the Emergency Child

Care Bridge program annually ongoing, all of which are deeply troubling, CWDA, CSAC, and SEIU have notable concerns and objections to the elimination of funding for caregiver approvals and FURS, as further noted below.

Caregiver Approvals

The May Revision proposes to eliminate the entire funding of \$50 million General Fund (GF) for caregiver approvals beginning in 2024-25 and annually ongoing. This funding was finally implemented on an ongoing basis beginning in 2022-23 to support state-mandated case management activities to perform timely approval of relative caregivers through the Resource Family Approval (RFA) process. Prior to 2022-23, the Legislature provided one-time funding in each of fiscal years 2020-21 and 2021-22 to cover the costs of caregiver approvals through the RFA process. Caregiver approval requirements were enhanced and expanded for all counties and caregivers as part of the Continuum of Care Reform (CCR) enacted in 2016. The one-time and eventually ongoing funding never fully funded the costs to counties of the new mandated workload, which is over \$100 million annually. County human services agencies have funded the difference from local realignment funding, even though they are not required to do so, because they recognize the foundational importance of this work to the child welfare system. However, the loss of this \$50 million will eliminate funding for over 200 child welfare social workers statewide and will diminish county capacity to perform caregiver approvals.

This proposed cut is contrary to efforts to maintain relative-based placements for foster youth and will lead to longer approval times for relative caregivers, during which time relatives will be unable to access other foster care benefits to which they would otherwise be entitled, including higher foster care rates through the current home-based foster care rate structure and county specialized care increments. The cut also would shift new costs to counties for payments that go beyond 120 days due to delays in relative approvals that do not meet statutory good cause exceptions.

Moreover, the cut is out of alignment with the Administration's permanent Foster Care Rate Reform proposal, which is intended to invest directly in family-based placements to keep youth connected to their relatives and communities of origin. Delays in relative approvals will mean that some caregivers will not have timely access to higher levels of foster care funding, supports, and services, as identified by the Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths (CANS) assessment tool. Cutting support to relatives to meet approval requirements, will undermine efforts to maintain relative-based placements for foster youth.

FURS

FURS was created by and for current and former foster youth and their caregivers to provide immediate, 24/7, individualized, trauma-informed support via a statewide hotline that

provides a warm hand-off to a local mobile response team comprised of at least two trained individuals (mental health clinicians, peer supports, social workers, etc.). Since its creation in 2019, FURS has responded to 5,000 calls (and increasing) from youth and caregivers a year, connecting them to ongoing mental health services, leading to a reduced likelihood of foster children and youth’s needs escalating to the point of requiring residential treatment or having a psychiatric emergency. FURS offers an alternative to contacts with law enforcement when behaviors escalate in the home, so that youth are not criminalized due to unmet mental health needs. FURS is one of the few concrete supports provided to caregivers in the foster care system, supporting county recruitment and retention of family-based caregivers, particularly kinship caregivers, which aligns with federal and state requirements and goals of increasing kinship care.

Elimination of FURS will lead to placement instability, delays to permanency, and a loss of family-based caregivers, and will likely result in an increased need for congregate care or other intensive and more costly behavioral health interventions. Ultimately, this will harm the foster children and youth whom the foster care system is required to protect.

Concluding Remarks

The State and counties have a shared responsibility in the care and future of children and youth in the foster care system. We understand that difficult choices are needed to address the multi-year budget deficit. However, we urge the Legislature to reject efforts to reduce and/or eliminate programs and services that provide upstream supports that have lifelong, profound impacts on vulnerable children, youth, and families.

Sincerely,

Eileen Cubanski, Interim Executive Director
County Welfare Directors Association

Justin Garrett, Senior Legislative Advocate
California State Association of Counties

Kelly Brooks-Lindsey, Legislative Representative
Urban Counties of California

Sarah Duckett, Policy Advocate
Rural County Representatives of California

cc: Chris Woods, Office of the Senate President Pro Tempore
Mareva Brown, Office of the Senate President Pro Tempore
Jason Sisney, Office of the Speaker of the Assembly
Kelsy Castillo, Office of the Speaker of the Assembly
Elizabeth Schmitt, Senate Budget and Fiscal Review Subcommittee No. 3
Scott Ogus, Senate Budget and Fiscal Review Subcommittee No. 3
Nicole Vazquez, Assembly Committee on Budget Subcommittee No. 2
Christian Griffith, Assembly Committee on Budget
Kirk Feely, Senate Republican Fiscal Office
Joe Shinstock, Assembly Republican Fiscal Office
Krista Pfefferkorn, Office of Senator Weiner
Kimberly Fuentes, Office of Senator Menjivar
Dubrea Sanders, Office of Assembly Member Jackson
Ginni Bella Navarre, Legislative Analyst's Office
Mark Newton, Legislative Analyst's Office
Richard Figueroa, Office of the Governor
Angela Pontes, Office of the Governor
Marko Mijic, California Health and Human Services Agency
Kim Johnson, California Department of Social Services
Michelle Baass, California Department of Health Care Services
Kris Cook, Human Services, California Department of Finance
County Caucus