



March 8, 2015

To: The Honorable Mark McGuire, Chair
Senate Human Services Committee

The Honorable Jim Beall, Chair
Senate Select Committee on Mental Health

Honorable Members, Senate Human Services Committee
Honorable Members, Senate Select Committee on Mental Health

From: Frank J. Mecca, Executive Director *jm*

RE: **Child Welfare Services: Foster and Kinship Care
Recruitment, Retention and Support Funding**

We thank you for your recent hearing, *Misuse of Psychotropic Medications in Foster care: Improving the Child Welfare Oversight and Outcomes within the Continuum of Care*, held February 24th. The County Welfare Directors Association of California (CWDA) and Santa Clara County Child Welfare Services provided testimony expressing our concerns on the overmedication of children in foster care, lack of alternative, trauma-informed treatment options, and on the importance of providing in-home services and support to youth and their caregivers to avert any need for medications.

The hearing clearly elucidated the dire need for high quality, loving foster caregivers who can provide stability and support to foster youth. For this reason, we request your support for our request to provide a \$30.2 million General Fund augmentation for Foster Parent and Kinship Care Recruitment, Retention and Support. Relatives and foster parents who can provide a stable and loving home are the best antidote for children experiencing trauma as a result of their abuse and neglect and subsequent removal from their home. It is critical that counties have an adequate supply of foster families, and appropriate services to both foster parents and relatives, to prevent the separation of sibling groups who often provide comfort and support to each other, and to enable foster children to remain in their home communities so that they can continue in their school and other activities that are familiar and calming. Research shows child outcomes improve when foster parents and relatives are supported—youth are less likely to experience changes in their placement, which may lead to group home placement, and are more likely to achieve permanency through adoption or guardianship.

The proposed \$30.2 million General Fund augmentation will allow counties to implement many promising and effective strategies to recruit and retain these loving families and ultimately improve child outcomes. This includes intensive family finding and engagement strategies, foster parent mentors, respite care and child care for working resource families, enhanced training for relative caregivers, and supplemental funding provided directly to relatives and foster parents to support “normalcy” for children in care. The proposal would also support a robust recruitment campaign and encourage collaboration with community agencies to recruit quality foster homes. These funds will provide much needed supports for foster and kin caregivers, and importantly for the children in their care.

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We ask you to join us in our efforts to increase in-home supports and services to relatives, foster families and their foster children. 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

cc: Mareva Brown, Consultant, Senate Human Services Committee
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CWDA

BUDGET FACT SHEET

Relative and Foster Parent Recruitment, Retention and Support

Prepared by the County Welfare Directors Association of California (CWDA)

Purpose:

California's 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. Whenever possible, foster children are placed with relatives or in another family-based environment capable of meeting the child's needs. Unfortunately, the lack of adequate supports for our kinship and licensed foster parents discourages new families from fostering and hurts counties' ability to recruit and retain high quality caregivers. Support to relatives and family-based homes is also a necessary precursor in the Continuum of Care Reform (CCR) effort to reduce the use of institutional care settings, such as group homes and shelter care, and provide permanent homes for foster children.

Proposed Solution:

Increase funding for relative and foster parent recruitment, retention and support by \$30.2 million General Fund (GF). These funds would provide direct support to foster children placed with kin caregivers and foster parents, increase placements in family-based settings consistent with the CCR goals, and most importantly, would improve child outcomes for safety, permanency and well-being.

Background:

When children are placed into foster care due to abuse and neglect, counties are mandated by federal and state law to first consider placement with relatives, and when a relative placement cannot be found, state law requires that we consider county licensed foster homes as the next priority for placement. Unfortunately counties have seen a steady decline in the number of licensed foster family homes since 2003.

These family caregivers receive the least amount of support to care for abused and neglected children. County-approved relatives and licensed foster parents receive a board and care payment that covers the basic costs of caring for a child including: housing, food, clothing, and minor other ancillary costs. Some families may qualify for a supplement if the child has behavioral or medical needs. Support to these kin and foster parents is very limited, even though they typically care for the same children with complex trauma, medical and other needs as those served in foster family agencies and group homes.

In addition, recent federal legislation (P.L. 113-187) requires that child welfare systems make efforts to "normalize" the foster child's experience by supporting the child's participation in activities with their peers. This includes extra-curricular activities, such as sports, and other expenses including graduation activities, school projects, and test fees for higher education, which are not currently factored into the basic foster care rate. For very young children, the added costs of diapers and wipes, infant formula, and clothing can strain a family's budget and serve as a disincentive to fostering.

Greater Supports Will Improve Child Outcomes:

Dedicated funding for recruitment, retention and support of relatives and foster parents is woefully inadequate and has been stagnant for over a decade. Only \$4.2 million (\$2.5 million GF) is available statewide for kin caregiver and county licensed foster parent support. Research and experience have shown that lack of caregiver support significantly contributes to caregiver turnover. With turnover, foster children are more likely to experience multiple placement disruptions that can lead to placement into group homes, and are less likely to achieve desired outcomes of adoption or guardianship with a permanent family.

Research also shows that increased support to relatives and foster caregivers can improve outcomes for children in the foster care system. For example, children placed with relatives are more likely to stay connected to their siblings and maintain family connections, experience decreased trauma, have better educational, mental health and social outcomes, and are less likely to suffer repeat maltreatment. The goal of the CCR is to improve the outcomes for children who come into the foster care system and ensure that services and supports are available to children in the most family-like setting. To achieve this will first require investment in a robust infrastructure of supports and services to relatives and foster families. While the Administration's CCR proposal acknowledges this by recommending an increase to foster parent recruitment, retention and support funding, this funding still falls short of the true need to increase and support relatives and county-licensed foster homes.

Investing in Strategies Proven to Improve Child Outcomes:

The proposed \$30.2 million GF augmentation will allow counties to implement many promising and effective strategies to recruit and retain these loving families and ultimately improve child outcomes. This includes intensive family finding and engagement strategies, foster parent mentors, respite care and child care for working resource families, enhanced training for relative caregivers, and supplemental funding provided directly to relatives and foster parents to support "normalcy" for children in care. The proposal would also support a robust recruitment campaign and encourage collaboration with community agencies to recruit quality foster homes. Finally, the proposal would support continued implementation of the Resource Family Approval (RFA) process, which has been identified as a key strategy by the CCR recommendations in developing a unified, family friendly and child-centered caregiver approval process in family-based settings.

For More Information:

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