

GOVERNOR'S VETO
AB 1378 (Rogers)
As Enrolled September 12, 2025
2/3 vote

SUMMARY

Expands circumstances when the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) is required, upon an Indian tribe's request, to enter into an agreement with a tribe to include when the agreement would prevent entry into foster care, and authorizes the agreement to be made for the sole purpose of the administration of prevention programs. Requires CDSS, subject to an appropriation, to provide funding to tribes to support the cost of legal representation for a child and their parent in foster care proceedings.

Senate Amendments:

- 1) Require CDSS, subject to an appropriation of funds for this purpose, to provide funding to tribes, tribal organizations, or tribal consortiums to support the cost of independent legal representation provided by an attorney for a child and the child's parent, guardian, and Indian custodian in foster care proceedings under the jurisdiction of an Indian tribe, tribal organization, or tribal consortium that has entered into an agreement with the state to administer all or part of the federal program that establishes the framework for federal funding to state and tribes for foster care, adoption assistance, and guardianship assistance.
- 2) Require CDSS, in consultation with Indian tribes with an executed agreement, to develop a cost allocation plan by March 31, 2026, consistent with federal law, that allows for administrative funds to support the costs of independent legal representation.
- 3) Make technical and clarifying changes.

Governor's Veto Message

This bill would require the California Department of Social Services (COSS) to enter into agreements with tribes, at their request, to prevent entries into foster care, specifying that such agreements would be made solely for the purpose of administering prevention services funded by the federal Family First Prevention Services Act. The bill would also require COSS to provide funding to tribes to support the cost of legal representation for a child and their parent in foster care proceedings.

I recognize the long-standing disparities faced by tribal children and their families, especially by governmental entities, and sincerely appreciate the author's intent to provide prevention services to at-risk tribal families. However, the specific approach proposed by this bill contains significant fiscal, legal, and programmatic issues. It is unclear whether the types of agreements proposed by this bill can be used to access federal funds. Requiring COSS to enter into such agreements would create significant uncertainties about how these agreements could be implemented and how funding would be provided.

Acknowledging the volatility of the current political and fiscal landscapes, my Administration proposed an alternative approach, consistent with the intent of this bill, that could have substantially benefited some of the most vulnerable tribal children and families. Unfortunately, this alternative was not accepted, leaving this bill deeply flawed.

COMMENTS

Background: Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA). Prior to the mid-1970s, Indian children faced high rates of removal – estimated to be as high as 25-35% of all Indian children – from their families, and subsequent placement in non-Indian homes. A years-long Congressional investigation in the 1970s determined that the four leading factors that contributed to removal of children and unnecessary termination of parental rights were:

- 1) State child welfare standards for assessing families that lack cultural competence;
- 2) Due-process violations against Indian children and their parents that existed on a system-wide basis;
- 3) Economic incentives that favored the removal of Indian children from their families and communities; and,
- 4) Social conditions existing in Indian country.

The Congressional investigation also found that states often failed to recognize the tribal relations of Indian people and their cultural and social standards when carrying out child custody proceedings.

Congress enacted federal legislation, ICWA (25 U.S.C. Section 1901 *et seq.*), to address a number of the issues related to the custody of Indian children and, ultimately, to ensure the preservation of Native American families, tribes, and tribal cultures. ICWA established minimum standards with which state courts must comply any time an Indian child is removed from their family or custodial home and placed in foster care or adoptive homes. It does not prohibit states from establishing higher standards. SB 678 (Ducheny), Chapter 838, Statutes of 2006, established Cal-ICWA, which revised and recast the portions of state code that address Indian child custody proceedings by codifying into state law various provisions of ICWA, the Bureau of Indian Affairs Guidelines for State Courts, and state Rules of Court.

This bill clarifies that CDSS, upon an Indian tribe's request, must enter into an agreement that prevents entry into foster care and authorizes the agreement to be made for the sole purpose of the administration of prevention programs under FFPSA. The bill also requires CDSS, subject to an appropriation, to provide funding to tribes to support the cost of legal representation for a child and the child's parent in foster care proceedings under the jurisdiction of an Indian tribe that has entered into an agreement with the state to administer prevention programs.

Family First Prevention Act (FFPSA). On February 9, 2018, President Trump signed H.R. 1892 (Larson), P.L. 115-123, which included FFPSA to reform child welfare services systems across the country by adopting two major changes:

- 1) Expansion of Title IV-E funds to focus on prevention: One of the largest changes made by FFPSA was expanding the use of Title IV-E funds—named for Title IV-E of the Social Security Act and which provides federal funding for states and tribes to provide foster care, transitional independent living programs for children, guardianship assistance, and adoption assistance for children with special needs—on services that would prevent the entry of children into foster care. Prior to FFPSA, states were permitted to use federal Title IV-E funds for children once they were placed in the child welfare system. Under FFPSA, states

are able to claim federal reimbursement for approved prevention services prior to a child being placed in foster care in order to allow candidates for foster care to remain with their parents or kin caregivers. Allowable services under FFPSA that are eligible for Title IV-E funds include: mental health and substance abuse prevention and treatment services provided by a qualified clinician; and in-home parent skills-based programs, including parenting skills training, parent education, and individual and family counseling.

- 2) Reduction of the number of youth in congregate care settings: The second component of FFPSA included the goal of reducing states' use of congregate or residential group care, commonly referred to as group homes, and which, as a result of state-level reforms to California's child welfare system, include short-term residential therapeutic programs.

Unequal Access to Prevention Funds. ICWA and its California counterpart, Cal-ICWA, similarly seek to prevent the removal of tribal children from their families. However, according to data compiled by the California Child Welfare Indicators Project, tribal children continue to enter foster care two and half times more often than White children. While tribes are often on the frontline of providing services to tribal children and their families, they are unable to access funding similar to counties and community-based organizations. Tribes have the strongest relationships with tribal families and are well-positioned to provide needed services; however, advocates report that the discrepancy in funding access means that many tribes are not able to provide the robust services to prevent tribal children from being separated from their families.

Under FFPSA, to qualify for funding, prevention services must meet specific evidence-based criteria. Programs are rated as either promising, supported, or well-supported by the Title IV-E Prevention Services Clearinghouse to ensure that the services are backed by research and have demonstrated effectiveness in preventing foster care placements. The Children's Bureau guidance dated July 30, 2024, to states with Title IV-E agreements with tribes, does not require tribes to comply with the evidence-based services requirements in the design of service programs. Therefore, tribes operating under such an agreement may determine the practice criteria for services that are adapted to the culture and context of the tribal communities served under the agreement.

The Children's Bureau issued guidance on July 26, 2019, clarifying that a Title IV-E agency that has an agreement with a tribe or any other public agency under section 472(a)(2)(B)(ii) of the Act may claim Title IV-E administrative costs for legal representation provided by tribal or public agency attorneys under the agreement in all stages of foster care related legal proceedings. The Title IV-E agency may also claim administrative costs for independent legal representation provided by an attorney for a candidate for Title IV-E foster care or a Title IV-E eligible child in foster care who is served under the agreement, and the child's parents, to prepare for and participate in all stages of foster care related legal proceedings

Current Agreements with Tribes. Existing law allows CDSS to enter into agreements with Indian tribes within the state to administer all or part of the programs under Title IV-E of the Social Security Act and includes the following programs: Prevention Services; Foster Care Services; Adoption Services; and Kinship Guardianship Services. According to the sponsors, when the federal government makes these direct agreements with tribes and states, tribes and states are required to implement foster care and adoption programs and allow the opting in of prevention and guardianship programs. In this proposal, CDSS remains the party having the direct agreement with the federal government and meeting the requirements of implementing all

programs required under Title IV-E. Because this proposal does not involve the federal agreements, but rather agreements with CDSS in which tribes take over part of the programs currently administered by the state for tribal children, the same federal rules do not apply. Both California and federal law specifically mention agreements for "all or part" of the program under Title IV-E.

According to the sponsors, because the administration of all these programs requires tribes to have immense existing administrative and social services capacity, there are currently only two out of 109 tribes that have entered into an agreement with CDSS under this authority. There are many tribes in California that do not have the capacity or desire to administer foster care, adoption and kinship guardian programs, but are eager to administer prevention programs. By allowing CDSS to enter into agreements with tribes to administer prevention services, it would open the door to existing federal funding to tribes. The sponsors note that this segmentation of Title IV-E programs is already federally allowable, and the intent of this legislation is simply to clarify that CDSS can follow the federal authorization to enter into an agreement with tribes for a single part of the Title IV-E funding. This would allow tribes to provide culturally driven services that could prevent the entry of tribal children into foster care, therefore, saving the State of California funding on needing to provide out-of-home care.

In addition to the clarity for authority for prevention program-only agreements, this legislation would also require CDSS, in consultation with Indian tribes with agreements, to develop a cost allocation plan by March 31, 2026, consistent with federal law, that allows for administrative funds under Title IV-E to support the costs of independent legal representation. Existing law provides that tribes with Title IV-E agreements are eligible to receive allocation of child welfare services funds. When tribes with Title IV-E agreements are implementing foster care, adoption and guardianship programs, they are required by CDSS to provide legal representation for the child at a minimum. According to the sponsors, although these legal services are currently funded for counties, CDSS states they do not have authority to provide the same support to tribes. This legislation aims to provide authority to CDSS so that tribes with existing and future agreements can meet requirements and implement prevention programs.

Equity Implications: The provisions of *this bill* seek to clarify CDSS' authority to make agreements with tribes in California to administer prevention services-only programs. *This bill* also requires CDSS, subject to an appropriation, to provide funding to tribes with agreements to provide foster care, adoption, and guardianship programs may use their existing child welfare services allocation funding to support advocates in tribal court for the tribal child.

According to the Association of American Indian Affairs, Title IV-E funding through state/tribal agreements provides critically needed infrastructure supports to tribes caring for tribal children in foster care. State/tribal agreements vary widely across states, but best practices allow for the maximum extent of funding to be provided to tribes through these agreements. The legal clarification proposed by this legislation would address the continued inequity in funding that tribes experience to care directly for their children and families, and would result in the reduction of tribal children in foster care.

In the implementation of FFPSA in California, CDSS has allowed county agencies to contract with a variety of community partners to provide prevention services and yet does not make agreements with tribes in the same manner. Through this legislation, tribes will have the same access to prevention program funding that other community-based service providers already

have. Access to funding on par with counties will allow tribes to provide culturally driven prevention services through government-to-government agreements, the most appropriate....

According to the Author

"California is proudly home to the highest Native American population per capita of any state, with our district encompassing many recognized and unrecognized Tribes. For generations, tribal nations and their families have been profoundly affected by state and federal laws and policies that have marginalized their communities. Native American children continue to be disproportionately represented in the California child welfare system, with their rates of involvement two and a half times higher than those of White children. That is a shocking and sad statistic. Every one of those kids represents a family that has been torn apart. [This bill] aims to address these historic disparities by providing Tribes with resources equal to those of county agencies, empowering them to offer direct services that help keep families together before intervention from child welfare services becomes necessary. This bill is good policy, but more importantly it's the right thing to do for California's kids."

Arguments in Support

According to co-sponsor, California Tribal Families Coalition, "Tribes, like our members, share in California's goal of targeting services that care for children and families early and directly in the community to reduce the entry of tribal children into the foster care system. This shared goal needs to be pursued with urgency as Native American children continue to enter foster care at two and a half times the rate of white children in California. [This bill] is an important step toward our shared goal. Through [this bill], Tribes will have the opportunity to make agreements with the California.

Arguments in Opposition

No opposition on file.

FISCAL COMMENTS

According to the Senate Appropriations Committee analysis on August 29, 2025, unknown ongoing costs for CDSS for state administration and for tribal child welfare agencies to fund legal representation (General Fund and federal funds).

VOTES

ASM HUMAN SERVICES: 6-0-0

YES: Lee, Castillo, Calderon, Elhawary, Jackson, Celeste Rodriguez

ASM JUDICIARY: 12-0-0

YES: Kalra, Dixon, Bauer-Kahan, Bryan, Connolly, Harabedian, Macedo, Pacheco, Lee, Sanchez, Stefani, Zbur

ASM APPROPRIATIONS: 14-0-1

YES: Wicks, Arambula, Calderon, Caloza, Dixon, Elhawary, Fong, Mark González, Hart, Pacheco, Pellerin, Solache, Ta, Tangipa

ABS, ABST OR NV: Sanchez

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 79-0-0

YES: Addis, Aguiar-Curry, Ahrens, Alanis, Alvarez, Arambula, Ávila Farías, Bains, Bauer-Kahan, Bennett, Berman, Boerner, Bonta, Bryan, Calderon, Caloza, Carrillo, Castillo, Chen, Connolly, Davies, DeMaio, Dixon, Elhawary, Ellis, Flora, Fong, Gabriel, Gallagher, Garcia, Gipson, Jeff Gonzalez, Mark González, Hadwick, Haney, Harabedian, Hart, Hoover, Irwin, Jackson, Kalra, Krell, Lackey, Lee, Lowenthal, Macedo, McKinnor, Muratsuchi, Nguyen, Ortega, Pacheco, Papan, Patel, Patterson, Pellerin, Petrie-Norris, Quirk-Silva, Ramos, Ransom, Celeste Rodriguez, Michelle Rodriguez, Rogers, Blanca Rubio, Sanchez, Schiavo, Schultz, Sharp-Collins, Solache, Soria, Stefani, Ta, Tangipa, Valencia, Wallis, Ward, Wicks, Wilson, Zbur, Rivas

SENATE FLOOR: 39-0-1

YES: Allen, Alvarado-Gil, Archuleta, Arreguín, Ashby, Becker, Blakespear, Cabaldon, Caballero, Cervantes, Choi, Cortese, Dahle, Durazo, Gonzalez, Grayson, Grove, Hurtado, Jones, Laird, Limón, McGuire, McNeerney, Menjivar, Niello, Ochoa Bogh, Padilla, Pérez, Reyes, Richardson, Rubio, Seyarto, Smallwood-Cuevas, Strickland, Umberg, Valladares, Wahab, Weber Pierson, Wiener

ABS, ABST OR NV: Stern

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 79-0-0

YES: Addis, Aguiar-Curry, Ahrens, Alanis, Alvarez, Arambula, Ávila Farías, Bains, Bauer-Kahan, Bennett, Berman, Boerner, Bonta, Bryan, Calderon, Caloza, Carrillo, Castillo, Chen, Connolly, Davies, DeMaio, Dixon, Elhawary, Ellis, Flora, Fong, Gabriel, Gallagher, Garcia, Gipson, Jeff Gonzalez, Mark González, Hadwick, Haney, Harabedian, Hart, Hoover, Irwin, Jackson, Johnson, Kalra, Krell, Lackey, Lee, Lowenthal, Macedo, McKinnor, Muratsuchi, Nguyen, Ortega, Pacheco, Papan, Patel, Patterson, Pellerin, Petrie-Norris, Quirk-Silva, Ramos, Ransom, Celeste Rodriguez, Michelle Rodriguez, Rogers, Blanca Rubio, Sanchez, Schiavo, Schultz, Sharp-Collins, Solache, Soria, Stefani, Ta, Valencia, Wallis, Ward, Wicks, Wilson, Zbur, Rivas

ABS, ABST OR NV: Tangipa

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