

Date of Hearing: March 10, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES  
Alex Lee, Chair  
AB 1602 (Blanca Rubio) – As Introduced January 16, 2026

**SUBJECT:** Foster youth: disaster aid assistance

**SUMMARY:** Creates the Child Welfare Disaster Response Program to be administered by the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) to support the needs of foster children and youth and their caregivers during a disaster. Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Creates the Child Welfare Disaster Response Account to fund the Child Welfare Disaster Response Program.
- 2) Requires, upon appropriation by the Legislature, moneys in the Child Welfare Disaster Response Account to be used for purposes of the program and to support the needs of foster children and youth and their caregivers during a disaster.
- 3) Defines “foster children and youth” to mean any of the following:
  - a) Children or nonminor dependents (NMDs) under the supervision of county child welfare agencies;
  - b) Wards placed in foster care under the supervision of county probation departments;
  - c) Children or NMDs under the supervision of Indian tribes that have entered into an agreement with CDSS pursuant to existing law.
- 4) Requires CDSS to determine eligibility criteria for the allocation of funds to applicants.
- 5) Authorizes a county child welfare agency, county probation department, or Indian tribe that has entered into an agreement to apply for funds on behalf of foster children and youth and their caregivers under supervision of the agency, department, or tribe based on the eligibility criteria established by CDSS.
- 6) Requires funds awarded to be available to meet the housing, clothing, transportation, and other tangible needs of foster children and youth and their caregivers that occur within 180 days of a local emergency proclamation by a local government or a state of emergency proclamation by the Governor.
- 7) States legislative intent for the Child Welfare Disaster Response Account to be replenished at the start of every fiscal year.
- 8) Authorizes gifts, donations, and bequests to be made to the Child Welfare Disaster Response Account, subject to any conditions or restrictions from CDSS.
- 9) Authorizes CDSS, notwithstanding the rulemaking provisions of the Administrative Procedure Act, to implement, interpret, or make specific these provisions by means of all-

county letters or similar written instructions from CDSS and to have the same force and effect as regulations.

**EXISTING LAW:**

- 1) Establishes a state and local system of child welfare services, including foster care, for children who have been adjudged by the court to be at risk of abuse and neglect or who have been abused or neglected. (Welfare and Institutions Code [WIC] § 202 *et seq.*)
- 2) Establishes a system of juvenile dependency for children for specified reasons and designates that a child who meets certain criteria is within the jurisdiction of the juvenile court and may be adjudged as a dependent child of the court. (WIC § 300 *et seq.*)
- 3) Requires, if a child is adjudged a dependent child of the court, and the court orders that a parent shall retain custody of the child subject to the supervision of the social worker, the parents to participate in child welfare services or services provided by an appropriate agency designated by the court. (WIC § 362(c))
- 4) Requires every hearing in which an order is made placing a child under the supervision of the juvenile court pursuant to WIC § 300, and in which the child is not removed from the physical custody of their parent, to be continued to a specific future date not to exceed six months after the date of the original dispositional hearing. (WIC § 364(a))
- 5) Requires CDSS to enter into agreements with Indian tribes, upon request, regarding the care, custody, and jurisdiction of Indian child welfare cases. Specifies these agreements, which involve no financial share of costs for the tribes and place all non-federal costs on the state, ensure that tribes adhere to specific state child welfare, foster care, and adoption standards. (WIC § 10553.1 *et seq.*)
- 6) Empowers the Governor to proclaim a state of emergency in an area affected or likely to be affected thereby when requested to do so by local government officials, or if the Governor finds that local authority is inadequate to cope with the emergency. Requires the Governor to proclaim the termination of the state of emergency at the earliest possible date that conditions warrant. (Government Code § 8625 and 8629)

**FISCAL EFFECT:** Unknown, this bill has not been analyzed by a fiscal committee.

**COMMENTS:**

**Background:** *Child Welfare Services* . California's child welfare services system was established with the goal of protecting youth from abuse and neglect and is designed to provide for the safety, health, and overall well-being of children. These services include foster care, and specialized service components such as emergency response hotlines to receive maltreatment reports, parenting classes and counseling, family reunification services, and permanent placement arrangements such as adoption or guardianship for children who cannot safely return to their parents.

When a child is identified as being at risk of abuse or neglect, reports can be made to either law enforcement or a county child welfare agency for further investigation. Often, these reports are

submitted by mandated reporters who are legally required to report suspicion of child abuse or neglect due to their profession, such as a teacher or healthcare provider.

When a child welfare case is open, counties are the primary governmental entity interacting with children and families when addressing issues of child abuse and neglect, and are responsible, either directly or through providers, for obtaining or providing the interventions and relevant services to protect children and assist families with issues related to child abuse and neglect.

California's child welfare services programs are administered by the 58 individual counties with each county organizing and operating its own program of child protection based on local needs while adhering to state and federal regulations.

CDSS secures federal funding to support child welfare services programs, provides statewide best practices training for social workers, conducts regulatory oversight and administration, and is responsible for the development of policy while also providing direct services such as adoption placements.

As of October 1, 2025, there are 37,577 children and youth ranging from birth up to 20 years of age in foster care.

*Disaster Services.* CDSS currently supports counties' mass care and shelter programs, as well as state and federal grant recovery programs. CDSS also supports local agencies to provide temporary shelter for those experiencing a disaster or emergency. The shelters are typically opened and operated by the American Red Cross and have assistance from local or county employees. During emergencies or disasters, Regional Emergency Operations Centers are used as a coordination hub and are managed by the California Governor's Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES). California has three Regional Emergency Operation Centers which are located in the Inland, Coastal, and Southern regions of the state. CDSS staff are permitted to deploy to one or all of the three Regional Emergency Operations Centers at the request of Cal OES in situations involving mass care, sheltering, or other human services functions that fall under the expertise of CDSS.

Cal OES serves as California's overall coordinator and agent to secure federal government resources through the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and responds, directs, and coordinates state and federal resources across the state during all major emergencies and disasters. Cal OES also supports local jurisdictions and communities through planning and preparedness activities, training, and facilitating the immediate response to an emergency through the longer-term recovery phase. Once activated by Cal OES, CDSS staff assist in the mass care and shelter function by tracking shelter status and feeding services; coordinating state resources; and, supporting the American Red Cross in sheltering operations.

CDSS is also authorized to provide grant assistance through the Individuals and Households Program (IHP) and the State Supplemental Grant Program (SSGP). The IHP is a joint federal and state program that can provide assistance following a disaster declared by the President. Under IHP, FEMA is authorized to provide awards in the form of rent, home repair or replacement, transportation repair or replacement, funeral expenses, personal property, medical, dental or other miscellaneous expenses. According to CDSS, FEMA disaster assistance covers basic needs, but does not normally compensate disaster victims for their entire loss. The SSGP is 100% state-funded and is authorized to provide grant funds to assist people who have suffered

damage in a disaster area declared by the President when the federal assistance to IHP is implemented. The grants are designed to assist with any eligible items not already addressed by the IHP, and in order to be eligible for SSGP, recipients are required to have first applied to FEMA and maximized the IHP award.

*This bill* would add to the array of grants and programs that direct resources to vulnerable populations affected by disasters by creating a program to specifically support the needs of foster youth and their caregivers during a disaster. The Child Welfare Disaster Response Program would allow counties to apply for funds to meet the housing, clothing, transportation, and other tangible needs of foster youth and their caregivers that occur within 180 days of a local emergency proclamation by a local government or a state of emergency proclamation by the Governor.

*Recent Disasters.* The list of recent Governor-proclaimed disasters in California includes severe winter storms, droughts, floods, earthquakes, and fires. Governor Newsom declared a state of emergency in December of 2025 for Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, San Deigo and Shasta counties due to a series of atmospheric rivers that caused flooding and landslides. CDSS worked with Cal OES to manage congregate shelters for impacted communities.

The impact of the fires in Los Angeles in January of 2025 is still being felt, as the affected communities try to rebuild. The fires burned over 57,000 acres of land and destroyed more than 18,000 homes and structures. According to CDSS, Los Angeles County had 442 child welfare/probation-supervised youth and 401 Los Angeles County employees who were initially impacted by these wildfire incidents. Additionally, 20 children are confirmed as impacted due to 13 homes/facilities burning down.

The Camp Fire, which in 2018 burned over 150,000 acres and destroyed more than 18,000 structures in Butte County, forced thousands of families to evacuate their homes. As a result, displaced people were forced to stay in shelters, hotels or tents, and parking lots, with many having no access to clothing or food beyond what they brought with them. According to Youth for Change and Youth and Family Programs, the Camp Fire displaced about 30 of the county's 500 foster youth. Regulations require resource families to seek approval from their social worker should they live more than two hours from their agency or cohabit with other people, even in an emergency, which limits many families' ability to immediately move out of the area where there may be more resources. Due to these limitations, having access to immediate assistance during a disaster becomes an acute necessity for resource families who house foster youth.

*Governor's Veto Message.* *This bill* is identical to AB 689 (Blanca Rubio) of 2025, which was vetoed by Governor Newsom. The Governor's veto message stated:

*"This bill establishes a statewide Child Welfare Disaster Response Fund and a Child Welfare Disaster Response Program to support the needs of foster children and youth and their caregivers during a disaster.*

*"While I share the author's goal to support foster children and youth and their caregivers during a disaster, this bill would create a new, unfunded grant program. Without an identified funding source, this bill will create significant, ongoing General Fund cost pressures to fund local assistance costs annually.*

*“In partnership with the Legislature this year, my Administration has enacted a balanced budget that recognizes the challenging fiscal landscape our state faces while maintaining our commitment to working families and our most vulnerable communities. With significant fiscal pressures and the federal government's hostile economic policies, it is vital that we remain disciplined when considering bills with significant fiscal implications that are not included in the budget, such as this measure.”*

In order to address Governor Newsom’s concerns stated above, the Author of *this bill* has submitted a letter to the budget chairs and their respective subcommittees requesting \$800,000 in one-time General Fund money for this purpose. Efforts are ongoing to seek inclusion of this funding in the final budget.

**Author’s Statement:** According to the Author, “[This bill] would establish a statewide Child Welfare Disaster Response Fund to provide immediate financial resources to address the urgent needs of children and youth in foster care and their caregivers following a declared natural disaster, including fires, floods, or earthquakes. While the state has a legal obligation to ensure the health, safety, and well-being of children and youth in foster care, existing funding mechanisms do not adequately account for the unanticipated costs that arise in the aftermath of a disaster. These costs may include the replacement of clothing, food, and essential personal belongings; temporary housing and placement stabilization; and transportation to maintain continuity of education, health care, and other required services. Children and youth in foster care and their caregivers experience distinct and heightened challenges during emergency situations, and delays in accessing resources can exacerbate trauma and placement disruption. [This bill] would ensure timely access to necessary resources following a disaster, supporting continuity of care and minimizing further harm to vulnerable children and families.”

**Equity Implications:** Youth in foster care have not only experienced the trauma of abuse or neglect, but trauma related to removal from their homes and communities. Early childhood trauma, as well as the trauma of system-involvement, often leads to poor educational and employment outcomes. Natural disasters can compound their trauma and further destabilize families who may have lost their housing as a result. Losing housing is a traumatic event for any family to experience and can be particularly acute when foster families are evacuated or displaced. There are challenges in maintaining stability and minimizing further disruptions for foster youth. *This bill* attempts to mitigate these challenges by ensuring foster youth and their caregivers will have access to dedicated resources to help them survive and rebuild in the event they are impacted by a natural disaster.

#### **RELATED AND PRIOR LEGISLATION:**

*AB 689 (Blanca Rubio) of 2025*, see comments above.

*SB 589 (Alvarado-Gil) of 2023*, was substantially similar to AB 689 but would have appropriated \$2 million from the General Fund to the Child Welfare Disaster Response Account for purposes of the Disaster Response Program and to support the needs of foster children and youth and their caregivers during a disaster. *SB 589 was held on the Assembly Appropriations Committee suspense file.*

*AB 1034 (Friedman) of 2019*, would have required every facility of each of the following to have an emergency and disaster plans: community care facilities that serve children or NMDs,

resource families, certified or licensed foster family homes, small family homes, community care facilities that serve adults, residential care facilities for persons with chronic life-threatening illness, and child care centers. AB 1034 would have also required the Community Care Licensing Division within CDSS to confirm during annual licensing visits that a plan is on file at the facility and includes the required content. *AB 1034 was held on the Assembly Appropriations Committee suspense file.*

**AB 3098 (Friedman), Chapter 348, Statutes of 2018**, required residential care facilities for the elderly (RCFEs) to have detailed emergency and disaster plans and to provide training on the plan to staff.

**AB 749 (Wolk), Chapter 477, Statutes of 2008**, required RCFEs licensed by CDSS to have a specified emergency plan available to residents and local emergency responders and, further required CDSS to confirm during licensing visits that the plan is on file at the facility.

**AB 2101 (Wolk) of 2008**, would have required RCFEs to develop emergency plans and make specific requirements for providing notices to residents and potential residents in the event of rate increases. *AB 2101 was held on the Assembly Appropriations Committee suspense file.*

## **REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:**

### **Support**

California Alliance of Caregivers (Co-Sponsor)  
 California Youth Connection (Co-Sponsor)  
 Children Now (Co-Sponsor)  
 Advokids  
 Alliance for Children's Rights  
 Aspiranet  
 California Family Resource Association  
 California State Association of Counties (CSAC)  
 Center for Public Interest Law/Children's Advocacy Institute/University of San Diego  
 Child Abuse Prevention Center and its Affiliates Safe Kids California, Prevent Child Abuse  
 California and the California Family Resource Association  
 Children's Law Center of California  
 County Welfare Directors Association of California  
 Good River Partners  
 Journey House  
 Los Angeles County Office of Education  
 On the Move  
 Public Counsel  
 Western Center on Law & Poverty, INC.

### **Opposition**

No opposition on file.

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