

Date of Hearing: April 15, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS  
Buffy Wicks, Chair  
AB 1602 (Blanca Rubio) – As Introduced January 16, 2026

Policy Committee: Human Services Vote: 6 - 0

Urgency: No State Mandated Local Program: No Reimbursable: No

**SUMMARY:**

This bill establishes the Child Welfare Disaster Response Program to support the needs of foster youth and their caregivers during a disaster. The bill relies on a General Fund appropriation to fund the program.

Specifically, this bill:

- 1) Establishes the Child Welfare Disaster Response Program to be administered by the California Department of Social Services (CDSS).
- 2) Creates the Child Welfare Disaster Response Account (account) to fund the program, and requires, upon appropriation by the Legislature, moneys allocated to the account be used for purposes of the program.
- 3) States legislative intent that the account be replenished at the start of every fiscal year.
- 4) Requires CDSS to determine eligibility criteria for the allocation of funds to applicants, and authorizes a county child welfare agency, county probation department, or Indian tribe, as specified, to apply for funds.
- 5) Requires funds awarded be available for 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 or a state of emergency proclamation by the Governor.
- 6) Allows gifts, donations, and bequests to be made to the account, subject to conditions or restrictions from CDSS.

**FISCAL EFFECT:**

- 1) Ongoing General Fund cost pressures of an unknown amount, but likely in the high hundreds of thousands to low millions of dollars annually, to fund the account and to potentially replenish it each fiscal year. Actual costs will vary depending on the number and extent of local and state emergency proclamations each year and the extent to which the Legislature funds the account.
- 2) CDSS anticipates minor and absorbable costs, indicating it would use existing disaster-response infrastructure to administer the program.

The author has submitted a one-time \$800,000 General Fund budget request to support the requirements of this bill.

The Legislative Analyst's Office recently warned of General Fund structural deficits of around \$35 billion per year in the 2027-28 fiscal year and ongoing.

#### COMMENTS:

1) **Purpose.** According to the author:

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.

2) **Background.** CDSS oversees a system of child welfare services (CWS), 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. California's CWS programs are administered at the local level by each of the state's 58 counties. Counties are required to update and maintain CWS Disaster Response Plans that describe the responsibilities and actions required for locating and monitoring dependent and probationary children.

CDSS's CWS Disaster Planning and Response Unit (DPRU) was created in 2021 to provide additional support during disasters to child welfare and probation agencies across the state. DPRU collaborates with all 58 counties to establish processes for making, activating, and operating emergency and disaster preparedness plans relating to children in placements under state care, from probation to foster care, to out-of-county placements. The DPRU has outlined four emergency management phases: preparedness, response, recovery and mitigation. Activities in the response phase include "communicating and coordinating services and information with local government agencies and child welfare personnel in areas adversely affected by a disaster."

This bill creates an additional disaster-response program specifically for foster youth and their caregivers.

3) **Related Legislation.** This bill is a reintroduction of AB 689 (Blanca Rubio), which was vetoed by the Governor last year. The author had requested but did not receive \$2 million in the state budget for purposes of the bill. The Governor's veto message stated, in part, AB 689 "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."

This year the author has requested \$800,000 in the state budget for the account. While this request is less than last year's \$2 million request, it does not address the issue of creating a General Fund cost with no identified funding source.

- 4) **Prior Legislation.** SB 589 (Alvarado-Gil), of 2023-24 Legislative Session, was nearly identical to this bill. SB 589 was held on this committee's suspense file.

**Analysis Prepared by:** Jennifer Swenson / APPR. / (916) 319-2081