
SENATE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES

Senator Becker, Chair
2025 - 2026 Regular

Bill No: AB 1602
Author: Blanca Rubio
Version: January 16, 2026
Urgency: No
Consultant: Heather Hopkins
Hearing Date: June 15, 2026
Fiscal: Yes

Subject: Foster youth: disaster aid assistance

SUMMARY

This bill would establish 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. Requires that funds awarded be made 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 or a state of emergency proclamation.

ABSTRACT

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, as specified. (*Welfare and Institutions Code [WIC] 202*)
- 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, as specified. (*WIC 300 et seq.*)
- 3) 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 he 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*)

This Bill:

- 1) Establishes the Child Welfare Disaster Response Program (Program) to be administered by CDSS.
- 2) Creates the Child Welfare Disaster Response Account (Account) to fund the Program.

- 3) Provides that, upon appropriation by the Legislature, moneys in the Child Welfare Disaster Response Account shall be used for purposes of the Program and to support the needs of foster children and youth and their caregivers during a disaster.
- 4) Requires CDSS to determine eligibility criteria for the allocation of funds to applications.
- 5) Provides that a child county welfare agency, county probation department, or Indian tribe, as specified, may 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) Provides that funds awarded shall be made 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) Provides that it is the intent of the Legislature that the Account may be replenished at the start of every fiscal year.
- 8) Provides that gifts, donations, and bequests may be made to the Account, subject to any conditions or restrictions from CDSS.
- 9) Provides that CDSS may implement, interpret, or make specific this chapter by means of all-county letters or similar written instructions from CDSS.

FISCAL IMPACT

According to the Assembly Appropriations Committee:

- 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.

BACKGROUND AND DISCUSSION

Purpose of the Bill:

According to the author, “AB 1602 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. AB 1602 would ensure timely access to necessary resources following a disaster, supporting continuity of care and minimizing further harm to vulnerable children and families.”

Child Welfare Services System

California’s child welfare services system is an essential component of the state’s safety net. Social workers in each county receive reports of abuse or neglect and investigate and resolve those reports. When an allegation is substantiated, a family is either provided with services to ensure a child’s well-being and avoid court involvement, or a child is removed and placed into foster care. In 2025, the state’s child welfare agencies received 398,861 reports of abuse or neglect. Of these, 45,856 reports contained substantiated allegations, and 17,886 children were removed from their homes and placed into foster care via the child welfare services system.

Disasters in California

According to Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) data, California had six declared disasters in 2025, fifteen in 2024, eleven in 2023, five in 2022, eleven in 2021, and twenty-three in 2020, with most being fire related. The California Office of Emergency Services data shows as of May 27, 2026, there had been seven new states of emergency declared by the Governor in 2026. The California Legislative Analyst’s Office reported that between 1950 and 2017 there were 95 Federal Major Disasters or Emergencies declared, and 189 Federal Fire Management Disaster Declarations. California has a long history of droughts and wildfires, but these are increasing in severity and in frequency due to climate change. The majority of the largest and most destructive wildfires in California have happened in the last 20 years.

Children in Foster Care During Natural Disasters

CDSS is the sole state agency mandated¹ to oversee Child Welfare Services Disaster Response Plans for California. CDSS issues an All County Letter or All County Information Notice that provides guidance to the counties and counties are required to submit their CWS Disaster Response Plan on an annual basis.

¹ Pursuant to the Child and Family Services Improvement Act of 2006, PL 109-288, Section 6 (16); Part B Section 422 of Title IV of the Social Security Act; and Senate Bill 703, Chapter 583, Section 29 (c) Statutes of 2007; and the WIC Section 16500.1(c)(1);

The CWS Disaster Response Plan describes the responsibilities and actions required for locating and monitoring dependent and probationary children under the care or supervision of the CDSS. Disaster response plans include procedures describing how the county will do the following:

- Identify, locate, and continue availability of services for CWS children, probation children, non-minor dependents, including non-minor dependents residing in foster care, out-of-county placements, children placed in or out of California through the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children, cross coordination with Tribal representative for Indian children in placements, and out-of-state non-minor dependents under county care or supervision who are displaced or adversely affected by a disaster;
- Respond appropriately to new CWS cases in areas adversely affected by a disaster and provide services in those cases;
- Address and provide care for unaccompanied minors;
- Remain in communication with caseworkers and other essential child welfare personnel who are displaced because of a disaster;
- Preserve essential program records; and
- Coordinate services and share information with other states and counties. Include a description of the process utilized by the county to ensure that information regarding children placed pursuant to the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children occurs with both the sending state and the CDSS.

CDSS's Child Welfare Services Disaster Planning and Response Unit was created in 2021 to provide additional support during disasters to Child Welfare and Probation agencies across the state. The unit collaborates with all 58 counties to establish effective 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 Disaster Planning and Response Unit has outlined four emergency management phases as follows:

- Preparedness Phase (including increased readiness): The preparedness phase involves activities taken in advance of an emergency and include mitigation, emergency/disaster planning, meeting with counties to review current CWS Disaster Response Plan and provide feedback, and public education. These activities develop operational capabilities and effective response to a disaster.
- Response Phase (including Pre-emergency, Emergency Response, and Sustained Emergency): When a large-scale disaster is inevitable, actions are precautionary and emphasize protection of life. Activities during this phase include outreach to county(ies) affected to ensure the safety of children/youth, families, and staff; and communicating and coordinating services and information with local government agencies and child welfare personnel in areas adversely affected by a disaster.

- Recovery Phase: During the recovery phase, procedures for the Disaster Planning and Response Unit include reviewing and updating the county Child Welfare Disaster Response Plan Template and Guide for improvements in disaster preparedness to better address the needs of all children/youth and their families.
- Mitigation Phase: Mitigation efforts occur both before and following disaster events and include eliminating or reducing the impact of hazards which exist with the State and are a threat to life and property. Mitigating these hazards, both before and after a disaster is particularly important when evaluating the impact on dependent and probationary children under the care or supervision of the State.

This bill seeks to build on response phase activities by providing the important aspect of funding to support the immediate needs of foster youth and their families during disasters.

Related/Prior Legislation:

AB 689 (Rubio, 2025) was identical to this bill and was vetoed by Governor Newsom.

SB 589 (Alvarado-Gil, 2023) was similar to this bill. The bill created a Child Welfare Disaster Response Program, which upon appropriation, would have allocated two million dollars from the General Fund to the Child Welfare Disaster Response Account to support the needs of foster children and youth and their caregivers during a disaster. SB 589 was held in the Assembly Appropriations Committee.

AB 1034 (Friedman, 2019) would have required every facility of each of the following types to have an emergency and disaster plans: community care facilities that serve children or nonminor dependents, 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. The bill would also have 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 held in the Assembly Appropriations Committee.

COMMENTS

When a disaster hits, families often have to move, at least temporarily, away from their homes. For children in foster care and their caregivers, this has an added challenge as children in foster care need to live near their biological families, often have court dates or therapy appointments, and have a right to attend their school of origin. A 2020 paper published in the University of Cincinnati's Children, Youth and Environments Journal looking at policies in the United States, New Zealand, and Japan found that "while all children are vulnerable in a natural disaster, children in foster care because of maltreatment are particularly vulnerable. In the immediate aftermath of a disaster, governments that do not specifically plan for these children may be unable to account for their welfare or location, and foster parents may not have access to government resources."² This bill seeks to address this increased vulnerability by establishing a

² <https://journals.uc.edu/index.php/cye/en/article/view/4807>

statewide Child Welfare Disaster Response Account and a Child Welfare Disaster Response Program to support the needs of foster children and youth and their caregivers during a disaster. Having these funds available to foster children and youth and caregivers to meet the housing, clothing, transportation, and other tangible needs that occur within 180 days of a local emergency proclamation or a state of emergency proclamation will help to ensure these children and families receive the supports that they need in a timely fashion.

PRIOR VOTES

Assembly Floor:	74 - 0
Assembly Appropriations Committee:	15 - 0
Assembly Human Services Committee:	6 - 0

POSITIONS

Support:

Children Now (Sponsor)
California Alliance of Caregivers (Co-Sponsor)
California Youth Connection (Co-Sponsor)
Alliance for Children's Rights
Aspiranet
CA Commission on the Status of Women and Girls
CA Legislative Women's Caucus
California Association of Christian Colleges and Universities
California State Association of Counties (CSAC)
Chief Probation Officers' of California (CPOC)
Child Care Resource Center
League of California Cities
Los Angeles County Office of Education
Los Angeles Unified School District
Women Lawyers of Sacramento

Oppose:

None received

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