GOVERNOR'S VETO
AB 1602 (Blanca Rubio)
As Enrolled September 2, 2026
2/3 vote

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.

Major Provisions

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) Requires CDSS to determine eligibility criteria for the allocation of funds to applicants.

4) 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.

5) 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.

6) States legislative intent for the Child Welfare Disaster Response Account to be replenished at the start of every fiscal year.

7) Authorizes CDSS 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.

Governor's Veto Message
This bill establishes a statewide Child Welfare Disaster Response Fund and a child Welfare Disaster Response Program to support 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, this bill would create a new, unfunded grant program. Last year I vetoed an identical bill, noting that without an identified funding source, it would have created significant, ongoing General Fund cost pressures to fund local assistance costs annually. That is still the case.

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 cohabitate 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* submitted a letter to the budget chairs and their respective subcommittees requesting $800,000 in one-time General Fund money for this purpose. Efforts to seek inclusion of this funding in the final budget were not successful.

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."

Arguments in Support
Co-sponsor of this bill include Children Now, California Youth Connection, and California Alliance of Caregivers, who write, "While everyone struggles in the face of natural disasters, children and youth in foster care and their caregivers have a unique set of challenges after a fire, flood or earthquake. When children and youth in foster care are evacuated or displaced, it becomes extremely difficult to ensure stability, nurture important relationships, and minimize disruptions in services, which compounds their trauma and instability. To mitigate these challenges, foster families and transition age youth in foster care must have access to critical Co-sponsor of this bill include Children Now, California Youth Connection, and California Alliance of Caregivers, who write, "While everyone struggles in the face of natural disasters, children and

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Arguments in Opposition
None on file.

FISCAL COMMENTS

According to the Assembly Appropriations Committee on April 15, 2026:

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.

VOTES

ASM HUMAN SERVICES: 6-0-1
YES: Lee, Castillo, Calderon, Elhawary, Jackson, Tangipa
ABS, ABST OR NV: Celeste Rodriguez

ASM APPROPRIATIONS: 15-0-0
YES: Wicks, Hoover, Aguiar-Curry, Calderon, Caloza, Dixon, Fong, Mark González, Krell, Pacheco, Pellerin, Sharp-Collins, Solache, Ta, Tangipa

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 74-0-6
YES: Addis, Aguiar-Curry, Ahrens, Alanis, Alvarez, Ávila Farías, Bains, Bauer-Kahan, Bennett, Berman, Boerner, Bonta, Bryan, Calderon, Caloza, Carrillo, Castillo, Connolly, Davies, DeMaio, Dixon, Elhawary, Ellis, Flora, Fong, Gabriel, Gallagher, Gipson, Jeff Gonzalez, Mark González, Hadwick, Haney, Harabedian, Hart, Hoover, Irwin, Jackson, Johnson, Kalra, Krell, Lee, Lowenthal, Macedo, McKinnor, Muratsuchi, Nguyen, Ortega, Pacheco, Papan, Patel, Patterson, Pellerin, Petrie-Norris, Quirk-Silva, Ransom, Michelle Rodriguez, Rogers, Blanca Rubio, Sanchez, Schiavo, Schultz, Sharp-Collins, Solache, Soria, Stefani, Ta, Tangipa, Valencia, Wallis, Ward, Wicks, Wilson, Zbur, Rivas
ABS, ABST OR NV: Arambula, Chen, Garcia, Lackey, Ramos, Celeste Rodriguez

SENATE FLOOR: 40-0-0
YES: Allen, Alvarado-Gil, Archuleta, Arreguín, Ashby, Becker, Blakespear, Cabaldon, Caballero, Cervantes, Choi, Cortese, Dahle, Durazo, Gonzalez, Grayson, Grove, Hurtado, Jones, Laird, Limón, McGuire, McNerney, Menjivar, Niello, Ochoa Bogh, Padilla, Pérez, Reyes, Richardson, Rubio, Seyarto, Smallwood-Cuevas, Stern, Strickland, Umberg, Valladares, Wahab, Weber Pierson, Wiener

UPDATED

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