

Date of Hearing: April 8, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Buffy Wicks, Chair

AB 1846 (Stefani) – As Amended March 18, 2026

Policy Committee:	Judiciary	Vote:	12 - 0
	Human Services		7 - 0

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

SUMMARY:

This bill makes explicit that preferential consideration for placement of a foster child with a relative applies throughout dependency proceedings until the hearing to terminate parental rights.

Specifically, this bill:

- 1) Requires county social workers to assess any previously unassessed relative who requests placement after the dispositional hearing.
- 2) Requires the court to state on the record the reasons placement with a relative was denied or delayed.

FISCAL EFFECT:

- 1) Unknown but likely minor costs to county child welfare agencies. The bill requires social workers to assess any previously unassessed relative who requests placement after the dispositional hearing, which may include home investigations, background checks, and reports to the court. Under existing law, social workers are already required to identify and assess relatives within 30 days of removal. Any new workload created by this bill would apply when relatives come forward after disposition and were not identified through existing family finding. The bill further limits the obligation by granting social workers discretion whether to assess relatives who first request placement after reunification services have been terminated. Although these county workload costs are mandated by the state, they are not reimbursable, but instead must be funded by the state pursuant to Proposition 30 (2012). Proposition 30 requires legislation enacted after September 30, 2012, that has an overall effect of increasing the costs already borne by a local agency for programs or levels of service mandated by realignment to apply to local agencies only to the extent the state provides annual funding for the cost increase.
- 2) Minor and absorbable court workload costs for stating reasons for delayed placement on the record.

COMMENTS:

- 1) **Purpose.** The author states the bill ensures that California's kin-first policy applies throughout the entire time a child is in foster care, giving courts clear authority to place children with family whenever it is safe and in the child's best interest.

- 2) **Background.** California law has long established a preference for placing foster children with relatives. Research consistently shows that kinship placements produce better outcomes, including fewer placement disruptions, stronger community ties, and improved emotional well-being. However, current law is ambiguous about whether the relative placement preference extends beyond the dispositional hearing. This ambiguity has led to inconsistent practices across counties — relative placement rates range from 28% in Sacramento County to 48% in Orange County, against a statewide average of 35%. This bill resolves the ambiguity by clarifying that the preference applies throughout the dependency process. It also provides safeguards for children who are already progressing toward permanency with a current caregiver by requiring courts and social workers to consider the child’s existing relationships and permanency progress when evaluating late-arriving relative requests.
- 3) **Prior Legislation.** AB 2929 (J. Carrillo), Chapter 845, Statutes of 2024, required courts at six-month status review hearings to consider whether social workers had made specified efforts to locate relatives, and required social workers to include additional documentation of family finding efforts in reports to the court.

AB 448 (J. Carrillo, 2023) would have imposed additional family finding documentation requirements on social workers and probation officers and was vetoed by the Governor, who cited cost concerns.

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