

Date of Hearing: April 22, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS
Buffy Wicks, Chair
AB 2441 (Celeste Rodriguez) – As Introduced February 20, 2026

Policy Committee: Human Services

Vote: 7 - 0

Urgency: No

State Mandated Local Program: No

Reimbursable: No

SUMMARY:

This bill requires the Office of Child Abuse Prevention (OCAP) to establish a pilot grant program to provide alternative support pathways for families in need, but whose children are not at risk of harm, to reduce unnecessary involvement in the child welfare system.

Specifically, this bill:

- 1) Requires the OCAP to establish the Community Supporting Innovation Pilot program to assess and demonstrate the effectiveness of community-based organizations serving as resource and referral avenues and alternative support pathways for families with complex needs or multiple stressors, or who are navigating significant barriers, but whose children are not at substantial risk of suffering serious physical harm or illness.
- 2) Requires the pilot program to include, among other components, an application from a community-based organization wishing to participate that satisfies specified criteria, the selection of 25 community-based organizations by OCAP to receive grants to operate community pathway teams and provide related training, and an evaluation to assess the effectiveness of the pilot program.
- 3) Requires OCAP to establish an internal unit of at least three staff positions to oversee implementation and consistency of the pilot program and alignment with other initiatives of the California Department of Social Services (CDSS).
- 4) Authorizes OCAP to contract with a nonprofit organization for assistance with implementation, compliance monitoring, data collection and reporting, and an independent evaluation of the pilot.
- 5) Requires OCAP, based on the evaluation, to provide recommendations to the Legislature for statewide implementation of a community-supporting framework by July 1, 2030.
- 6) Sunsets these provisions on January 1, 2031.

FISCAL EFFECT:

- 1) Estimated General Fund costs of an unknown amount, but likely in the tens of millions of dollars over the three-year life of the pilot program to fund grants to support 25 family resources centers (FRCs) and community-based organizations across the state.

- 2) CDSS estimates GF implementation and administrative costs to OCAP and CDSS of \$7 million in the first year and \$2.45 million thereafter, including three positions at OCAP to implement the program, seven research data and IT positions and one attorney at CDSS, contract costs, and data collection and reporting tool costs. The bill requires OCAP to establish an internal unit of at least three staff positions.

The author is requesting \$40 million in one-time funding over three years in the 2026-27 state budget to support 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:

Every year in California, thousands of families come into contact with our child welfare system—not because they are abusive or neglectful, but because they are struggling. They are navigating poverty, housing instability, lack of childcare, or unmet mental health needs. California must do better in providing the support families need to stay safely together. Family Resource Centers provide critical, preventative services that strengthen families before a crisis escalates, and are embedded in communities as trusted, culturally competent hubs of support. [This bill] will establish an evidence-based pilot program to ensure that families who have needs and are not found to be at risk of abuse or neglect are not simply turned away.

- 2) **Background.** California's mandated reporting system was designed to protect children from harm. But a substantial amount of data raises the question of whether the system, as currently structured, has cast a net so wide that it sweeps in families who need help rather than having their child placed in foster care, and then leaves them with no support when reports are not substantiated. In California, nearly half of all reports to child welfare hotlines involve suspected neglect, and approximately 90% of those reports are ultimately unsubstantiated.

Data shows significant overlap between poverty and child welfare system involvement: 85% of families investigated for neglect have incomes below 200% of the federal poverty line, and neglect referrals are disproportionately concentrated among families who are not employed, receive public assistance, and live in impoverished neighborhoods.

In 2023, the California Child Welfare Council established the Mandated Reporting to Community Supporting Task Force, to review and reform California's mandated reporting system and address the disproportionate impact of mandated reporting on marginalized communities. The Task Force's 2024 recommendations included developing alternatives for families to access services prior to a call being made to the child abuse hotline, naming FRCs specifically as a key provider of those resources.

This bill implements that recommendation by establishing resource referral avenues as alternative pathways to assist families who are in need, outside of the child welfare services

system. According to the Child Abuse Prevention center and the California family Resource Association (SFRA), sponsors of the bill:

[This bill] allows the state to test, evaluate, and refine a prevention-focused model before considering any future scale. The proposal leverages existing infrastructure within OCAP and trusted community-based networks, minimizing administrative overhead and maximizing direct investment into families. This investment is modest when compared to downstream system costs. A single child welfare investigation can cost thousands of dollars, while foster care placements can exceed \$30,000 annually per child, and congregate care placements significantly more. By strengthening early community-based support, this pilot has the potential to reduce avoidable system involvement and generate long-term cost savings for the state.

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