

Date of Hearing: May 13, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Buffy Wicks, Chair

AB 2478 (Schultz) – As Introduced February 20, 2026

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

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

SUMMARY:

This bill establishes a Kinship Family Approval (KFA) process within the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) as a streamlined pathway for relatives, nonrelative extended family members (NREFMs), and extended family members of Indian children to become approved foster care providers.

Specifically, this bill:

- 1) Requires CDSS, by January 1, 2028, to adopt a KFA process to approve a relative, NREFM, or extended family member of an Indian child to be a kinship family, defined as an individual or family who has successfully met the home environment assessment and family engagement standards necessary for providing care for a child placed by a county child welfare department or a probation department (county) by court order or voluntarily placed by a parent or legal guardian.
- 2) Requires counties to ensure that relatives, NREFMs, and extended family members of an Indian child are provided information regarding available approval processes and the option to choose between the KFA process, the resource family approval (RFA) process, and, in the case of an Indian child, a tribally approved home (TAH).
- 3) Makes confidential certain personal identifying information, written evaluation reports, and court proceedings relating to kinship families, except as specified, and requires the application form signed by a kinship family applicant to include a declaration that the information submitted is true, correct, and contains no material omissions of fact to the best knowledge and belief of the applicant.
- 4) Adds kinship families, as defined, to the list of persons and entities entitled to access pupil records without written parental consent or judicial order.
- 5) Expands the scope of an existing misdemeanor to include any person who willfully and knowingly, with intent to deceive, makes a false statement or fails to disclose a material fact in a KFA application.
- 6) Expands the court's authority to place a child after an order of removal, or on a temporary or emergency basis, in the home of a NREFM or an extended family member, in addition to a relative, as under existing law, regardless of the status of any criminal record exemption,

KFA, or RFA, if the court finds the placement does not pose a risk to the health and safety of the child.

- 7) Recasts and revises existing reporting and recommendation provisions enacted by AB 2830 (Rivas), Chapter 417, Statutes of 2024, with the new KFA statutory framework.
- 8) Makes conforming changes across the Education Code, Family Code, Government Code, Health and Safety Code, Insurance Code, Penal Code, Probate Code, and Welfare and Institutions Code (WIC) to make provisions currently applicable to resource families also applicable to kinship families, and deletes obsolete provisions.
- 9) Conditions implementation on the continued availability of Title IV-E federal financial participation.

FISCAL EFFECT:

- 1) Ongoing General Fund (GF) costs in the low hundreds of thousands of dollars annually to CDSS for an additional staff position to meet the requirements of the bill.
- 2) Potential ongoing GF administrative cost savings to county child welfare agencies of an unknown amount, related to the simplified approval of, and placement of children with, kinship families provided by this bill. County administrative costs, although state mandated costs, fall under realignment (Proposition 30, 2012) and thus savings would accrue to the GF.
- 3) Ongoing Proposition 98 costs of an unknown amount, potentially minor, to local education agencies (LEAs) to the extent LEAs statewide must provide kinship families access to pupil records. These costs are potentially reimbursable by the state, subject to a determination by the Commission on State Mandates.

COMMENTS:

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

Despite officially embracing a "kin-first" culture that prioritizes placing children with family or trusted adults in a child's life, California currently utilizes a one-size-fits-all foster care approval process that can create unnecessary administrative burdens for a child's kin. Research has consistently and resoundingly shown that children experience a wide range of better outcomes when placed with familiar caregivers. California's current system, the Resource Family Approval (RFA) process, was largely designed for licensed foster parents and does not fully reflect the needs of relatives and other trusted adults who step forward during a family crisis. Administrative burdens and irrelevant requirements can create undue delays for placing a child in the safest and most supportive setting possible.

[This bill creates] the KFA pathway, a streamlined approval framework for kin caregivers. This pathway is designed specifically to recognize that caregivers with pre-existing meaningful relationships

with a child should not face unnecessary regulatory barriers designed for traditional foster homes.

- 2) **Background.** California’s child welfare system provides for the safety of children in the state at risk of abuse, neglect, or abandonment. The child welfare system aims to keep or reunite children with their parents wherever possible. In circumstances where reunification is not appropriate, courts and social workers work to place children in a variety of alternative placements, including with a relative, an adoptive family, or a guardian. Over the last decade, the Legislature has reaffirmed that state policy is to keep the child with their family member, including NREFMs whenever possible, if it is safe to do so and in the best interest of the child.

California’s statutes work in tandem with federal law that governs placement of dependent youth in foster settings. In September 2023, the federal Administration on Children and Families (ACF) published a final rule regarding separate licensing and approval standards for kinship placements. The rule permits Title IV-E agencies (consisting of state agencies and specified tribal welfare entities) to claim Title IV-E federal financial participation on behalf of a minor placed in a relative or kinship licensed or approved foster family home when the agency uses different licensing or approval standards for relative or kinship homes and non-relative or non-kinship foster family homes. In response to the change at the federal level, AB 2830 (Rivas), Chapter 417, Statutes of 2024, directed CDSS to adopt, no later than January 1, 2027, a simplified approval process for relative caregivers consistent with the ACF guidance.

This bill complies with the directive in AB 2830 by establishing a kinship family approval (KFA) process.

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