

---

## SENATE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES

Senator Becker, Chair  
2025 - 2026 Regular

---

**Bill No:** AB 2478  
**Author:** Schultz  
**Version:** February 20, 2026  
**Urgency:** No  
**Consultant:** Heather Hopkins  
**Hearing Date:** June 15, 2026  
**Fiscal:** Yes

**Subject:** Kinship family approval

### SUMMARY

This bill establishes a Kinship Family Approval process in 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.

### 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 have been abused or neglected, as specified. (*Welfare and Institutions Code [WIC] 202*)
- 2) States that the purpose of foster care law is to provide maximum safety and protection for children who are currently being physically, sexually, emotionally abused, neglected, or exploited, and to ensure the safety, protection, and physical and emotional well-being of children who are at risk of harm. (*WIC 300.2*)
- 3) Requires a county to file a petition to the court requesting a detention hearing within 48 hours of placing a child under temporary custody to determine whether a child should remain in custody and whether any specific court permissions are necessary to provide for the health and safety of the child. (*WIC 313 and 319*)
- 4) Requires, if a child is removed, the social worker to conduct, within 30 days, an investigation in order to identify and locate all grandparents, parents of a sibling of the child, if the parent has legal custody of the sibling, adult siblings, other adult relatives of the child, including any other adult relatives suggested by the parents. (*WIC 309(e)(1)*)
- 5) Requires preferential consideration be given to a request by a relative to have the child placed with the relative if the child has been removed from the physical custody of the child's parent(s). (*WIC 361.3(a)*)

- 6) Requires, when placing a child in the home of a relative, an extended family member, or NREFM on a temporary basis, the court to consider the recommendations of the social worker based on the assessment required by current law, including the results of a criminal records check and prior child abuse allegations, if any, before ordering that the child be placed with a relative or NREFM. *(WIC 319(h)(3))*
- 7) States the intent of the Legislature to preserve and strengthen a child's family ties whenever possible and to reunify a foster youth with their biological family whenever possible, or to provide a permanent placement alternative, such as adoption or guardianship. *(WIC 16000)*
- 8) Requires CDSS to provide technical assistance to encourage and facilitate the county placement agency's evaluation of placement needs and the development of needed placement resources and programs. *(WIC 16001.1)*
- 9) Defines "child and family team" to mean a group of individuals who are convened by the placing agency and who are engaged through a variety of team-based processes to identify the strengths and needs of the child or youth and their family, and to help achieve positive outcomes for safety, permanency, and well-being. *(WIC 16501(a)(4))*
- 10) Requires CDSS, in consultation with county child welfare agencies, foster parent associations, and other interested community parties, to implement a unified, family friendly, and child-centered Resource Family Approval process to replace the existing multiple processes for licensing foster family homes, certifying foster homes by licensed foster family agencies, approving relatives and nonrelative extended family members as foster care providers, and approving guardians and adoptive families. *(WIC 16519.5)*
- 11) Requires updates by counties as it relates to children placed by child welfare, the family finding activities attempted or underway, or other activities to connect the child to caring adults outside of the congregate (group home) care setting; identification of the counties that have any existing or planned contracts, or efforts to directly provide or contract for intensive child specific recruitment services; identification of counties with any existing or planned specialty mental health services targeted to address the mental health service needs of a foster child transitioning from congregate care to permanency or other family based care setting, and a summary of any gaps that remain; and the number of children that successfully achieved permanency following receipt of the services described. *(WIC 16523.57)*
- 12) Requires the juvenile court to make full consideration of the proximity of a child's natural parents to the potential foster care placement of that child in order to facilitate visitation and family reunification, and if possible, for the placement to be made in the home of a relative, unless the placement would not be in the best interest of the child. *(Family Code [FAM] 7950(a))*
- 13) Requires counties to ensure that a resource family applicant completes a minimum of 12 hours of preapproval caregiver training on certain topics, including, the effects of trauma, grief and loss, child abuse and neglect, child development and behavior, health issues in foster care, permanence, well-being and education needs of children, among others. *(WIC*

*16519.5(g)(13))*

- 14) Requires CDSS to adopt, no later than January 1, 2027, a simplified approval process for relative caregivers consistent with the definition of foster family homes for the purposes of federal Title IV-E eligibility. Requires the simplified approval process for relative and kinship caregivers to be implemented only if and to the extent that federal financial participation is available and after necessary federal approval of state plan amendments has been obtained. *(WIC 16519.3(a))*
- 15) Authorizes CDSS to convene government-to-government consultation with tribes and communicate with other interested individuals and organizations to develop a simplified approval process for relative and kinship caregivers that achieves the goals of safety, permanency, and well-being for children in out-of-home care. Permits the communication to include seeking feedback from relative and kinship caregivers, foster youth, county child welfare and probation agencies, foster family agencies, tribes, tribal organizations, tribal consortia, and other interested community partners. *(WIC 16519.3(b))*
- 16) Defines “nonrelative extended family member” to mean an adult caregiver who has an established familial or mentoring relationship with the child, as described. *(WIC 11400(n))*

**This Bill:**

- 1) Requires CDSS, on or before January 1, 2028, to adopt a Kinship Family Approval 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 Kinship Family Approval process, the Resource Family Approval process, and, in the case of an Indian child, a tribally approved home.
- 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, including records of grades, transcripts, attendance, discipline, online communications on school-established platforms, and individualized education programs, 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 Kinship Family Approval 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, Kinship Family Approval, or Resource Family Approval, 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 Kinship Family Approval statutory framework.
- 8) Makes conforming changes across various codes 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.
- 10) Makes legislative findings demonstrating that the provisions of this bill limiting access to the writings of public officials and agencies address interests of sufficient weight to justify those limitations, as required by the California Constitution.

### **FISCAL IMPACT**

According to the Assembly Appropriations Committee:

- 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.

### **BACKGROUND AND DISCUSSION**

**Purpose of the Bill:**

According to the author, “While California has officially embraced a ‘kin-first’ culture that prioritizes placing children with family or trusted adults in a child’s life, the state 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 improved outcomes when placed with familiar caregivers, including greater placement and educational stability, higher likelihood of reuniting with siblings, and improved mental and behavioral health. California’s current system, the Resource Family Approval 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. To address these unacceptable delays and promote the resounding benefits of kinship care, the legislature enacted AB 2830 (Rivas) to direct the California Department of Social Services to develop policy improvements to strengthen kinship placement pathways.

“AB 2478 follows through on these improvements by creating the Kinship Family Approval 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. This legislation additionally clarifies emergency placement rules, allows agencies to access Title IV-E federal funding that encourages the creation of separate kinship approval pathways, and extends the eligibility of very limited criminal record exemptions to a wider range of kin so that children can be placed quickly with safe caregivers who are familiar to them. By reducing administrative delays and strengthening family-first placement policies, AB 2478 will maximize kin placements while remaining unwavering in safeguards that secure the safety and stability of a caregiver’s home. The Kinship Family Approval pathway will ensure children are more efficiently given a sense of stability, consistency, and permanency with a caregiver that will keep them connected to their communities and culture.”

### *Child Welfare System (CWS)*

The CWS is an essential component of the state’s safety net. Social workers in each county who receive reports of abuse or neglect, investigate and resolve those reports. When a case 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 CWS.

### *Resource Family Approval Program*

The Resource Family Approval process approves Resource Families to provide placement for children and youth who fall under the jurisdiction of the juvenile court or otherwise in the care of a county child welfare agency. A Resource Family can be an individual, couple or family who wants to provide care to related or unrelated children. This program also allows for emergency placements with relatives and NREFM. CDSS describes Resource Family Approval as a family-friendly and child-centered caregiver approval process that combines elements of the foster parent licensing, relative approval, and approvals for adoption and guardianship processes. The

Resource Family Approval includes a comprehensive family evaluation assessment, home environment check, and training for all families, including relatives. It also allows for a seamless transition to permanence.

The original intention of the Resource Family Approval process was to streamline foster parent approval and adoption approval requirements to facilitate an easy transition for caregivers from foster placement to adoption. The combination of these two processes results in a Resource Family Approval process that can be lengthy and involved – with requirements such as a home health and safety assessment, background check, and health questionnaire. While California has taken steps to streamline this process to address barriers and delays, there is not currently a single more streamlined process for relatives and kin.

On September 28, 2023, the federal Administration for Children and Families published a final rule regarding licensing and approval standards for kinship placements. The rule permits Title IV-E agencies to claim Title IV-E federal financial participation on behalf of a child who is 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 foster family homes and non-relative or non-kinship foster family homes. This bill creates a simplified approval process for relative placement, consistent with federal regulations.

#### *Placement with Relatives*

State and federal law include a preference to place children in out-of-home care with relatives. For example, Welfare and Institutions Code Section 361.3 states that preferential consideration must be given to a request by a relative of the child for placement of the child with the relative. The child's social worker must always determine whether such a placement is appropriate by considering a variety of factors, as specified, including the ability of the relative to provide a safe, secure, and stable environment for the child, but preference is provided for a relative or NREFM placement.

Numerous national studies have documented the poor outcomes of children and youth who are removed from their homes and placed into the child welfare system. Children involved with the CWS system have increased rates of chronic health problems, developmental delays and disabilities, mental health needs, and substance abuse problems. Many youth in care have experienced traumatic events, including removal from their homes that lead to symptoms such as depression, behavior problems, hypersensitivity, and emotional difficulties. Twenty-five percent of youth who age-out of care experience Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder – double the rate of U.S. war veterans.<sup>1</sup> Studies have also demonstrated the significant benefit to children in the child welfare system that are placed with relatives rather than with strangers in foster homes or in group care. A 2008 study in the Archives of Pediatric and Adolescent Medicine found that children placed into kinship care had fewer behavioral problems three years after placement than children who were placed into foster care. This study also noted that a large body of research acknowledges the evidence that children in kinship care are less likely to change placements, benefiting from increased placement stability and better outcomes. Researchers also found that children placed with relatives were more likely to remain in their same neighborhood, be placed

---

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.childrensaidsociety.org/files/upload-docs/report\\_final\\_April\\_2.pdf](http://www.childrensaidsociety.org/files/upload-docs/report_final_April_2.pdf)

with siblings, and have consistent contact with their birth parents than other children in foster care.<sup>2</sup>

### *Streamlined System of Kinship Family Approval*

In 2024, AB 2380 (Rivas) was enacted and required CDSS, by January 1, 2027, to adopt a simplified approval process for relative caregivers, consistent with federal regulations, and specified that the simplified approval process be implemented only if, and to the extent that, federal financial participation is available. AB 2380 created a statutory framework and this bill seeks to enact that framework by codifying procedures for a streamlined Kinship Family Approval. This streamlined process is outlined below.

**What Families Can Qualify:** This bill defines “kinship family” as including an individual or family that is a relative, a NREFM or an extended family member of an Indian child. This bill expands the pool of eligible caregivers beyond what AB 2830 contemplated. AB 2830 focused primarily on relatives, with an option for CDSS to expand the definition to include NREFMs, however this bill makes that expansion mandatory by requiring the Kinship Family Approval process to be available to relatives, NREFMs, and extended family members of an Indian child.

**Background Checks:** Under existing law, Resource Family Approval requires background checks of all adults residing in the home and these background checks are completed by the county. This process remains unchanged for Kinship Family Approval. Under existing law, Resource Family Approval uses a simplified exemption process for misdemeanor convictions in the last 3 years or felony convictions not otherwise prohibited in the last 5 years except for all non-exemptible felony convictions. The process for Kinship Family Approval is the same however, the list of non-exemptible convictions is limited to the federal non-exemptible convictions list.

**Training:** Under existing law, Resource Family Approval families must complete a minimum of 12 hours preapproval and a minimum of eight hours annually. For Kinship Family Approval, the 12 hours can be completed no later than 90 days following approval. This allows for flexibility when a child needs to be placed in an emergency situation and there is no time for training before placement. The current training topics required for Resource Family Approval include a broad range of issues such as the effects of trauma, accessing services, rights of a child in foster care, and cultural needs of children. For Kinship Family Approval, the training requirements include topics such as birth parent relationships and safety issues, child and adolescent development, and navigating the child welfare and probation systems.

For Kinship Family Approval a county may require a family to receive relevant specialized training for the particular needs of a child. A county may also require additional training to support the family. The training under the Kinship Family Approval system is more individually tailored to the specific child and family.

**Ongoing Support:** Under existing law, Resource Family Approval families are provided ongoing support as needed to complete the approval process and families are monitored periodically and updates are completed at least biannually. These processes remain the same for Kinship Family Approval, however additional supports are also provided. This ongoing support is provided no

---

<sup>2</sup> *Arch Pediatr Adolesc Med.* 2008;162(6):550-556. doi:10.1001/archpedi.162.6.550.

less than quarterly to ensure that the proper services and supports are being provided to successfully care for the child or NMD. These supports can be provided through things such as the Peer Mentorship Program, Foster Family Agency, and California Kinship Navigator.

Documentation of Approval: For Resource Families, a written report is prepared regarding their approval or denial. For Kinship Family Approval a written summary is prepared which includes a summary of the family strengths and if the family is approved or denied.

The goal of this streamlined Kinship Family Approval is to make it easier for placements to be approved, and children to be placed, in settings where they are most likely to thrive.

**Related/Prior Legislation:**

*AB 2830 (Rivas, Chapter 417, Statutes of 2024)* required CDSS to adopt a simplified approval process for relative caregivers by January 1, 2027, conditioned on federal financial participation, and required CDSS to recommend statutory changes for full implementation by September 30, 2026.

*SB 354 (Skinner, Chapter 687, Statutes of 2021)* adopted changes to the criminal background check process during RFA for relatives; permitted court authorization of relative placements regardless of criminal exemption or RFA status; required CDSS to report on criminal record exemptions.

**COMMENTS**

In 2011, the Resource Family Approval process was implemented to unify a previously patchwork system of foster care approval processes. Under current law, the Resource Family Approval process applies to all potential placement families, regardless of whether they have a relationship to the child. This can result in extended family and NREFM caregivers facing administrative barriers that can delay placement, or possibility even prevent it. The Resource Family Approval process aligns more with the needs of licensed foster parents than for kin. This bill creates a simplified approval process for relative placement, consistent with federal regulations. Studies have shown time and time again that foster youth have better outcomes when they are placed with family. The Kinship Family Approval process will help to ensure more children are placed in homes that keep them connected to their communities and help them thrive.

**PRIOR VOTES**

Assembly Floor:	78 - 0
Assembly Appropriations Committee:	15 - 0
Assembly Human Services Committee:	7 - 0

**POSITIONS**

**Support:**

Alliance for Children's Rights (Co-Sponsor)

Children's Law Center of California (Co-Sponsor)

Children's Legal Services of San Diego (Co-Sponsor)

County Welfare Directors Association of California (Co-Sponsor)

California Alliance of Caregivers

California State Association of Counties (CSAC)

**Oppose:**

None received

-- **END** --