

THIRD READING

Bill No: AB 2478
Author: Schultz (D) and Solache (D), et al.
Amended: 8/21/26 in Senate
Vote: 21

SENATE HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE: 4-0, 6/15/26

AYES: Becker, Ochoa Bogh, Laird, Pérez

NO VOTE RECORDED: Weber Pierson

SENATE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE: 13-0, 6/23/26

AYES: Umberg, Niello, Allen, Ashby, Caballero, Durazo, Laird, Reyes, Stern,
Valladares, Wahab, Weber Pierson, Wiener

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 78-0, 5/26/26 - See last page for vote

SUBJECT: Kinship family approval

SOURCE: Alliance for Children's Rights,
Children's Law Center of California
Children's Legal Services of San Diego
County Welfare Directors Association of California

DIGEST: 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.

Senate Floor Amendments of 8/21/26 avoid double jointing amendments with SB 1017, AB 2746, and SB 1051 of the current legislative year.

Senate Floor Amendments of 8/20/26 make a number of technical and clarifying changes.

ANALYSIS:

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) 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))
- 3) 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))
- 4) 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))
- 5) 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 July 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) Adds double jointing language with SB 1017, AB 2764, and SB 1051 to avoid chaptering out issues.

Background

Author Statement. 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.¹ 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 with siblings, and have consistent contact with their birth parents than other children in foster care.²

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.

¹ http://www.childrensaidsociety.org/files/upload-docs/report_final_April_2.pdf

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

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 misdemeanors 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 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.

FISCAL EFFECT: Appropriation: No Fiscal Com.: Yes Local: Yes

According to the Senate Appropriations Committee, CDSS estimates the following General Fund costs:

- State operations costs of \$339,000 in 2026-27 and \$333,000 annually thereafter.
- One-time costs of \$275,000 for automation updates for CWS-CARES and \$448,500 for automation costs for CalSAWS.

- Ongoing annual costs to backfill the loss of federal Title IV-E funding for Aid to Families with Dependent Children-Foster Care is \$735,541 per 100 foster youth cases and \$581,618 per 100 non-minor dependent cases. Due to uncertainty in caseloads, the estimate was based on a cost per 100 cases. The actual caseload may potentially be lower. These costs relate to the provisions in the bill that would create a pathway for placements that received authorization by the court but were either 1) a non-relative extended family member or extended family member of an Indian child who was denied kinship family approval or 2) a non-relative extended family member or extended family member of an Indian child who was approved for the kinship family approval process but with a federal non-exemptible conviction.
- The California Department of Justice indicates no significant fiscal impact to the department.
- Unknown costs to local agencies for administration. Proposition 30 of 2012 provides that any legislation enacted after September 30, 2012 that has an overall effect of increasing the costs already borne by a local agency for realigned services applies to local agencies only to the extent that the state provides annual funding for the cost increase. Other costs may be potentially reimbursable by the state, subject to a determination by the Commission on State Mandates.

SUPPORT: (Verified 8/14/26)

Alliance for Children's Rights (Co-source)
Children's Law Center of California (Co-source)
Children's Legal Services of San Diego (Co-source)
County Welfare Directors Association of California (Co-source)
California Alliance of Caregivers
California State Association of Counties
County of Humboldt
County of Ventura
Habematolel Pomo of Upper Lake

OPPOSITION: (Verified 8/14/26)

None received

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 78-0, 5/26/26

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

NO VOTE RECORDED: Muratsuchi, Celeste Rodriguez

Prepared by: Heather Hopkins / HUMAN S. / (916) 651-1524
8/24/26 11:36:18

**** END ****