

CONCURRENCE IN SENATE AMENDMENTS

CSA1 Bill Id:AB 562 Author:(Solache and Bryan)

As Amended Ver:August 29, 2025

Majority vote

SUMMARY

Adds to the requirements for county welfare departments when investigating the names and locations of relatives of a child who has been removed from their home due to abuse or neglect, to include an annual review of data comparing the statewide average rate of placing children with relatives, and mandatory communication with the Center for Excellence in Family Finding, Engagement, and Support (Center) if the county's average is less than the statewide average.

Senate Amendments

Strike the requirement, each year that a county has a rate of placing children with relatives that is less than the statewide average, for the board of supervisors of that county to, at least once, include the topic for discussion on the agenda of a regularly noticed meeting of the full board.

COMMENTS

The Continuum of Care Reform (CCR) was a series of reforms to the child welfare services system that aimed to improve outcomes for foster youth by prioritizing family-based care over group settings, among other changes. As part of this reform, and as established through AB 403 (Stone), Chapter 773, Statutes of 2015, the transition away from group homes and toward homelike settings with kin began implementation in 2017. Prior to this implementation, foster youth often spent extended periods in group homes that were designed as long-term placements. Based on documented studies, long-term group home stays result in worse outcomes for youth than family-based care.

Family Finding and Due Diligence. It has long been the goal of the child welfare services system to preserve familial ties whenever possible. Under certain circumstances, family maintenance services are provided to families in order to prevent the removal of children from their parents' home, including family therapy, parenting classes, or substance use treatment. However, in instances when a youth is removed from the custody of their parents and placed in the child welfare services system, county social workers are required to identify and locate all relatives or non-relative extended family members (NREFMs) who may serve as caregivers to the youth.

Data from the California Child Welfare Indicators Project reveal a wide discrepancy in relative placement rates across counties in California. While the state average is 35%, Los Angeles County, which has one-third of California's foster youth population, has a relative placement rate of 39%. Orange County places 48% of foster youth with relatives, Alameda County stands at 36%, and San Diego County at 37%. Sacramento County, with 28%, is not only lower than the state average, it is also significantly lower than the national average of 35.5%.

This bill would require each county, beginning January 1, 2027, and annually thereafter, to review publicly available data, including data from the California Child Welfare Indicators Project, comparing the statewide average rate of placing children with relatives, with the county's average rate of placement.

According to an All County Letter (ACL No. 18-42), distributed by the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) in 2018, family finding and engagement is defined as a broad concept which encompasses not only the statutory requirements pertaining to identifying, locating, and notifying the relatives of a child in foster care, but also related efforts to foster life-long familial connections for children and youth in care. The ACL further describes these additional efforts, which are meant to enhance the long-term well-being of children and youth in care, as an important component of CCR's goal to reduce the use of congregate care and improve child welfare outcomes. Intensive family finding and engagement can be used by counties to identify possible relative or NREFM placements for children and youth currently placed in congregate settings, potentially allowing those children and youth to step down to a home-based care setting, consistent with the goals of CCR. Counties are also urged to seek out the practice of family finding and engagement above and beyond the statutorily required relative finding, to be used when opening a case as a way to identify the best possible placement for the child or youth.

Existing law requires the juvenile court, during the dispositional hearing for a dependent child, to make a finding that the child's social worker has exercised due diligence in identifying, locating and notifying the child's relatives. As of January 1, 2017, all new relative home placements were required to meet Resource Family Approval (RFA) standards, and counties are encouraged to consider the likelihood that a relative will be able to meet those standards when evaluating that possibility. Existing law also provides for a process to place with a relative, either on an emergency basis or based on a compelling reason, prior to full RFA approval.

Social workers are required to use due diligence in their efforts to identify, locate, and notify relatives up to the fifth degree of kinship and to include paternal relatives, with the exception of relatives for whom a history of domestic violence has been determined.

Center for Excellence in Family Finding, Engagement, and Support. As a result of AB 207, (Committee on Budget), Chapter 573, Statutes of 2022, CDSS contracted with the University of California, Davis to launch the Center to support efforts to keep children and youth connected to their biological and extended families. The Center was designed to provide multi-tiered, culturally appropriate training and technical assistance, such as conducting evidence-based, organization-specific assessments of implementation activities, and strengthening trauma-informed practices and programs related to family finding and engagement.

This bill would require, in a county that has a rate of placing children with relatives that is less than the statewide average, which as of October 1, 2024, is 35%, the county welfare director to communicate with the Center to identify best practices to improve its average rate of placing children with relatives. Additionally, and by no later than December 1 of the year of the review, the county would be required to begin communications with the Center, and to communicate with the Center at least three more times on a quarterly basis, which includes email, video conference, or phone call.

Child Welfare Indicators Project. As directed by the Children's Bureau, the California Child and Family Services Review (C-CFSR) System was established when the Child Welfare System Improvement and Accountability Act was enacted through AB 636, (Steinberg), Chapter 678, Statutes of 2001, and was modeled after the federal CFSR. The C-CFSR was designed to improve outcomes for children in the child welfare system while holding county and state agencies accountable for the outcomes achieved.

Also as part of AB 636, beginning in the 2003-04 fiscal year, CDSS is required to report to the Legislature annually, on progress in meeting the outcome measures developed by the California Health and Human Services Agency. As a result of a partnership with the University of California, Berkeley and CDSS, the California Child Welfare Indicators Project was created to fulfill the requirements of AB 636 to track outcome measures including child maltreatment, allegation, investigation, and substantiation rates along with entry and in-care rates and also provides a point-in-time look at the number of youth in care that can be sorted according to age, race, ethnicity, and length of placement. The California Child Welfare Indicators Project also provides the public with this valuable information.

According to the Author

"Children in the foster system deserve our best efforts to ensure safety, placement stability, and to keep families together when possible. In light of our unique moral responsibility to our foster children, one of the best things we can do for them is to connect and place them with family that is capable of providing a safe and supportive environment. This legislation will help improve outcomes and ease the foster youth placement transition for children and families."

Arguments in Support

According to co-sponsor, Children's Advocacy Institute (CAI), "[This bill] is inspired by a December 2023 report authored by CAI highlighting the dismal record of Sacramento County's efforts to find family placements for foster children. The report titled *No Family for the Holidays in Sacramento*, received and continues to receive extensive press coverage throughout the Central Valley, with a Sacramento County grand jury recently highlighting 'that the Board of Supervisors should increase the number of teenagers placed with relatives.' . . . Because the most important thing we can do for abused or neglected children who cannot be returned to their parents is to place them with family, [this bill] is modestly aimed at ensuring that a county's track record of finding family members for foster children is an ongoing topic of conversation at the board of supervisors' level of every county, as it properly should be given our moral responsibility to these children."

Arguments in Opposition

No opposition on file.

FISCAL COMMENTS

According to the Senate Appropriations Committee on August 29, 2025, unknown General Fund cost pressures to fund counties 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. Local agencies are not be obligated to provide programs or levels of service required by legislation above the level for which funding has been provided.

VOTES:**ASM HUMAN SERVICES: 7-0-0**

YES: Lee, Castillo, Calderon, Elhawary, Essayli, Jackson, Celeste Rodriguez

ASM APPROPRIATIONS: 14-0-1

YES: Wicks, Sanchez, Arambula, Calderon, Caloza, Dixon, Elhawary, Fong, Mark González, Hadwick, Hart, Pacheco, Solache, Ta

ABS, ABST OR NV: Pellerin

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 78-0-1

YES: 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, Kalra, Krell, Lackey, Lee, Lowenthal, Macedo, McKinnor, Muratsuchi, Nguyen, Ortega, Pacheco, Papan, Patel, Patterson, Pellerin, Petrie-Norris, Quirk-Silva, Ramos, Ransom, Celeste Rodriguez, Michelle Rodriguez, Rogers, Blanca Rubio, Sanchez, Schiavo, Schultz, Sharp-Collins, Solache, Soria, Ta, Tangipa, Valencia, Wallis, Ward, Wicks, Wilson, Zbur, Rivas

ABS, ABST OR NV: Stefani

UPDATED

VERSION: August 29, 2025

CONSULTANT: Jessica Langtry / HUM. S. / (916) 319-2089

FN: 0001935