
THIRD READING

Bill No: AB 689
Author: Blanca Rubio (D)
Amended: 8/29/25 in Senate
Vote: 21

SENATE HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE: 5-0, 6/30/25

AYES: Arreguín, Ochoa Bogh, Becker, Limón, Pérez

SENATE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE: 7-0, 8/29/25

AYES: Caballero, Seyarto, Cabaldon, Dahle, Grayson, Richardson, Wahab

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 79-0, 6/2/25 - See last page for vote

SUBJECT: Foster youth: disaster aid assistance

SOURCE: Children Now, California Alliance of Caregivers, California Youth Connection

DIGEST: This bill establishes a statewide Child Welfare Disaster Response Fund and a Child Welfare Disaster Response Program to support the needs of foster children and youth and their caregivers during a disaster. Requires that funds awarded be made available to meet the housing, clothing, transportation, and other tangible needs of foster children and youth and their caregivers that occur within 180 days of a local emergency proclamation or a state of emergency proclamation.

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 who have been abused or neglected, as specified. (Welfare and Institutions Code (WIC) section 202)

- 2) Establishes a system of juvenile dependency for children for specified reasons, and designates that a child who meets certain criteria is within the jurisdiction of the juvenile court and may be adjudged as a dependent child of the court, as specified. (WIC section 300 et seq.)
- 3) Empowers the Governor to proclaim a state of emergency in an area affected or likely to be affected thereby when requested to do so by local government officials, or if he finds that local authority is inadequate to cope with the emergency. Requires the Governor to proclaim the termination of the state of emergency at the earliest possible date that conditions warrant. (Government Code sections 8625 and 8629)

This bill:

- 1) Establishes the Child Welfare Disaster Response Program (Program) to be administered by the California Department of Social Services (CDSS).
- 2) Creates the Child Welfare Disaster Response Account to fund the Program.
- 3) Provides that, upon appropriation by the Legislature, moneys in the Child Welfare Disaster Response Account shall be used for purposes of the Program and to support the needs of foster children and youth and their caregivers during a disaster.
- 4) Requires CDSS to determine eligibility criteria for the allocation of funds to applications.
- 5) Provides that a child county welfare agency, county probation department, or Indian tribe, as specified, may apply for funds on behalf of foster children and youth and their caregivers under supervision of the agency, department, or tribe based on the eligibility criteria established by CDSS.
- 6) Provides that funds awarded shall be made available to meet the housing, clothing, transportation, and other tangible needs of foster children and youth and their caregivers that occur within 180 days of a local emergency proclamation by a local government or a state of emergency proclamation by the Governor.
- 7) Provides that it is the intent of the Legislature that the Account may be replenished at the start of every fiscal year.
- 8) Provides that gifts, donations, and bequests may be made to the Account, subject to any conditions or restrictions from CDSS.

- 9) Provides that CDSS may implement, interpret, or make specific this chapter by means of all-county letters or similar written instructions from CDSS

Comments

According to the author. “AB 689 would establish a statewide Child Welfare Disaster Response Fund to ensure resources are immediately available to meet the urgent needs of children and youth in foster care and their caregivers in the aftermath of a natural disaster such as a fire, flood or earthquake. While the state is legally responsible for meeting the needs of children and youth in foster care, they rarely receive the funding needed to cover extra, unexpected costs that occur in the wake of a natural disaster, including the replacement of lost clothing, food and essential belongings, securing temporary housing, or travel to and from a temporary home to appointments and school. While everyone struggles in the face of natural disasters, children and youth in foster care and their caregivers deal with a unique set of challenges after an emergency and the state should ensure resources are immediately available post-disaster to reduce additional trauma and minimize further disruptions.”

Child Welfare Services (CWS) The CWS system 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 2024, the state’s child welfare agencies received 417,513 reports of abuse or neglect. Of these, 46,457 reports contained allegations that were substantiated and 17,390 children were removed from their homes and placed into foster care via the CWS system.

After the county child welfare department becomes involved with families, approximately 12 months of services are provided to children who are able to remain safely in their home while the family receives services. This is considered family preservation services and the child does not come under the jurisdiction of the juvenile dependency court during this time. If it is determined that a child cannot remain in the home, even with family preservation and support services, the child comes under the jurisdiction of the county’s juvenile dependency court while the family is served by a CWS system social worker.

If it is determined that a child cannot remain in the home, even with family preservation and support services, the child comes under the jurisdiction of the county’s juvenile dependency court while the family is served by a CWS system social worker. This system seeks to ensure the safety and protection of these

children, and where possible, preserve and strengthen families through visitation and family reunification. It is the state's goal to reunify a foster child or youth with their biological family whenever possible.

Disasters in California. According to Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) data, California had fifteen declared disasters in 2024, eleven in 2023, five in 2022, eleven in 2021, and twenty-three in 2020, with most being fire related. The California Office of Emergency Services data shows as of May 28, 2025, there had been five new states of emergency declared by the Governor in 2025, involving twenty-five executive orders. The California Legislative Analyst's Office reported that between 1950 and 2017 there were 95 Federal Major Disasters or Emergencies declared, and 189 Federal Fire Management Disaster Declarations. California has a long history of droughts and wildfires, but these are increasing in severity and in frequency due to climate change. The majority of the largest and most destructive wildfires in California have happened in the last 20 years.

Children in Foster Care During Natural Disasters. CDSS is the sole state agency mandated¹ to oversee Child Welfare Services Disaster Response Plans for California. CDSS requests all counties have a Disaster Response Plan. CDSS issues an All County Letter or All County Information Notice that provides guidance to the counties. The Child Welfare Services Disaster Response Plan is sent to the 58 Child Welfare Services and Probation Department counties annually. Counties are required to update and return plans that address the following criteria to the Disaster Planning and Response Unit by December 31st of each year.

The Disaster Response Plan describes the responsibilities and actions required for locating and monitoring dependent and probationary children under the care or supervision of the CDSS. Disaster response plans includes procedures describing how the county will do the following:

- Identify, locate, and continue availability of services for CWS children, probation children, non-minor dependents, including non-minor dependents residing in foster care, out-of-county placements, children placed in or out of California through the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children, cross coordination with Tribal representative for Indian children in placements, and out-of-state non-minor dependents under county care or supervision who are displaced or adversely affected by a disaster;

¹ Pursuant to the Child and Family Services Improvement Act of 2006, PL 109-288, Section 6 (16); Part B Section 422 of Title IV of the Social Security Act; and Senate Bill 703, Chapter 583, Section 29 (c) Statutes of 2007; and the WIC Section 16500.1(c)(1);

- Respond appropriately to new CWS cases in areas adversely affected by a disaster and provide services in those cases;
- Address and provide care for unaccompanied minors;
- Remain in communication with caseworkers and other essential child welfare personnel who are displaced because of a disaster;
- Preserve essential program records; and
- Coordinate services and share information with other states and counties. Include a description of the process utilized by the county to ensure that information regarding children placed pursuant to the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children occurs with both the sending state and the CDSS.

CDSS's Child Welfare Services Disaster Planning and Response Unit was created in 2021 to provide additional support during disasters to Child Welfare and Probation agencies across the state. The unit collaborates with all 58 counties to establish effective processes for making, activating, and operating emergency and disaster preparedness plans relating to children in placements under state care, from probation to foster care, to out-of-county placements. The Disaster Planning and Response Unit has outlined four emergency management phases as follows:

- Preparedness Phase (including increased readiness): The preparedness phase involves activities taken in advance of an emergency and include mitigation, emergency/disaster planning, meeting with counties to review current CWS Disaster Response Plan and provide feedback, and public education. These activities develop operational capabilities and effective response to a disaster.
- Response Phase (including Pre-emergency, Emergency Response, and Sustained Emergency): When a large-scale disaster is inevitable, actions are precautionary and emphasize protection of life. Activities during this phase include outreach to county(ies) affected to ensure the safety of children/youth, families, and staff; and communicating and coordinating services and information with local government agencies and child welfare personnel in areas adversely affected by a disaster.
- Recovery Phase: During the recovery phase, procedures for the Disaster Planning and Response Unit include reviewing and updating the county Child Welfare Disaster Response Plan Template and Guide for

improvements in disaster preparedness to better address the needs of all children/youth and their families.

- **Mitigation Phase:** Mitigation efforts occur both before and following disaster events and include eliminating or reducing the impact of hazards which exist with the State and are a threat to life and property. Mitigating these hazards, both before and after a disaster is particularly important when evaluating the impact on dependent and probationary children under the care or supervision of the State.

This bill seeks to build on the response phase activities by providing the important aspect of funding to support the immediate needs of foster youth and their families during disasters.

Related/Prior Legislation

SB 589 (Alvarado-Gil, 2023) was identical to this bill. SB 589 was held in the Assembly Appropriations Committee.

AB 1034 (Friedman, 2019) would have required every facility of each of the following types to have an emergency and disaster plans: community care facilities that serve children or nonminor dependents, resource families, certified or licensed foster family homes, small family homes, community care facilities that serve adults, residential care facilities for persons with chronic life-threatening illness, and child care centers. The bill would also have required the Community Care Licensing Division within CDSS to confirm during annual licensing visits that a plan is on file at the facility and includes the required content. This bill was held on suspense in Assembly Appropriations Committee.

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

According to the Senate Appropriations Committee analysis:

- Unknown, ongoing General Fund cost pressures to fund the proposed Child Welfare Disaster Response Account.
- Minor and absorbable costs to the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) for state administration.

SUPPORT: (Verified 8/29/25)

Children Now (Sponsor)

California Alliance of Caregivers (Co-Sponsor)
California Youth Connection (Co-Sponsor)
Advokids
Alliance for Children's Rights
Aspiranet
California Alliance of Child and Family Services
California Apartment Association
California Association of Christian Colleges and Universities
California Court Appointed Special Advocate Association
California Family Resource Association
California State Association of Counties
Child Abuse Prevention
County Welfare Directors Association of California
First Place for Youth
Western Center on Law & Poverty
Youth Law Center

OPPOSITION: (Verified 8/29/25)

None received

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 79-0, 6/2/25

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, 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, Stefani, Ta, Tangipa, Valencia, Wallis, Ward, Wicks, Wilson, Zbur, Rivas

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