

CONCURRENCE IN SENATE AMENDMENTS

CSA1 Bill Id:AB 689 Author:(Blanca Rubio)

As Amended Ver:August 29, 2025

Majority vote

SUMMARY

Creates the Child Welfare Disaster Response Program (Program) to support the needs of foster youth and their caregivers during a disaster, to be administered by the California Department of Social Services (CDSS), and establishes the Child Welfare Disaster Response Account (Account) to fund the Program.

Senate Amendments

- 1) Strike the requirement for the Legislature to allocate \$2 million from the General Fund to the Account.
- 2) Define, for purposes of these provisions, "foster children and youth."
- 3) Clarify that a county welfare agency, county probation department, and Indian tribe 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.
- 4) Authorize CDSS to implement, interpret, or make specific these provisions by means of all-county letters or similar written instructions from CDSS, which shall have the same force and effect as regulations.

COMMENTS

Child Welfare Services (CWS). California's CWS system was established with the goal of protecting youth from abuse and neglect and is designed to provide safety, health, and overall well-being of children. When a child is identified as being at risk of abuse or neglect, reports can be made to either law enforcement or a county child welfare agency. Often, these reports are submitted by mandated reporters who are legally required to report suspicion of child abuse or neglect due to their profession, such as a teacher or healthcare provider.

California's CWS programs are administered by the 58 individual counties with each county organizing and operating its own program of child protection based on local needs while adhering to state and federal regulations. When a child welfare case is open, counties are the primary governmental entity interacting with children and families when addressing issues of child abuse and neglect, and are responsible, either directly or through providers, for obtaining or providing the interventions and relevant services to protect children and assist families with issues related to child abuse and neglect.

CDSS secures federal funding to support CWS programs, provides statewide best practices training for social workers, and conducts program regulatory oversight and administration, and is responsible for the development of policy while also providing direct services such as adoption placements.

As of January 1, 2025, there are 38,894 youth up to 21 years of age in foster care.

Disaster Services. CDSS currently supports counties' mass care and shelter programs, as well as state and federal grant recovery programs. CDSS also supports local agencies to provide temporary shelter for those experiencing a disaster or emergency. The shelters are typically

opened and operated by the American Red Cross and have assistance from local or county employees. During emergencies or disasters, Regional Emergency Operations Centers are used as a coordination hub and are managed by the California Governor's Office of Emergency Services (CalOES). California has three Regional Emergency Operation Centers which are located in the Inland, Coastal, and Southern regions of the state. CDSS staff is permitted to deploy to one or all of the three Regional Emergency Operations Centers at the request of CalOES in situations involving mass care, sheltering, or other human services functions that fall under CDSS' expertise.

CalOES serves as California's overall coordinator and agent to secure federal government resources through the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and responds, directs, and coordinates state and federal resources across the state during all major emergencies and disasters. CalOES also supports local jurisdictions and communities through planning and preparedness activities, training, and facilitating the immediate response to an emergency through the longer-term recovery phase. Once activated by CalOES, CDSS staff assist in the mass care and shelter function by: tracking shelter status and feeding services; coordinating state resources; and supporting the American Red Cross in sheltering operations.

CDSS is also authorized to provide grant assistance through the Individuals and Households Program (IHP) and the State Supplemental Grant Program (SSGP). The IHP is a joint federal and state program that can provide assistance following a disaster declared by the President. Under IHP, FEMA is authorized to provide awards in the form of rent, home repair or replacement, transportation repair or replacement, funeral expenses, personal property, medical, dental or other miscellaneous expenses. According to CDSS, FEMA disaster assistance covers basic needs, but does not normally compensate disaster victims for their entire loss. The SSGP is 100% state-funded and is authorized to provide grant funds to assist people who have suffered damage in a disaster area declared by the President when the federal assistance to IHP is implemented. The grants are designed to assist with any eligible items not already addressed by the IHP and in order to be eligible for SSGP, recipients are required to have first applied to FEMA and maximized the IHP award.

This bill would add to the array of grants and programs that direct resources to vulnerable populations affected by disasters by creating a program to specifically support the needs of foster youth and their caregivers during a disaster. The Program will allow counties to apply for funds to meet the housing, clothing, transportation, and other tangible needs of foster 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.

Recent Disasters. With an increase in climate-change related events, communities throughout California are impacted. The list of recent Governor-proclaimed disasters in California include severe winter storms, drought, floods, earthquakes, and fires. The impact of the recent fires in Los Angeles in January of 2025 is still being felt, as the affected communities try to rebuild. The fires burned over 57,000 acres of land and destroyed more than 18,000 homes and structures. According to CDSS' Disaster Planning and Response Unit, they have daily communication and report outs with Los Angeles County on the impacted youth from the wildfire incidents. According to CDSS, Los Angeles County had 442 child welfare/probation-supervised youth and 401 Los Angeles County employees that were initially impacted by these wildfire incidents. Additionally, 20 children are confirmed as impacted due to 13 homes/facilities burning down. The Camp Fire, which in 2018 burned over 150,000 acres and destroyed more than 18,000 structures in Butte County, forced thousands of families to evacuate their homes. As a result, displaced people were forced to stay in shelters, hotels or tents, and parking lots, with many having no access to clothing or food beyond what they brought with them. According to Youth for Change and Youth and Family Programs, the Camp Fire displaced about 30 of the county's

500 foster youth. Regulations require resource families to seek approval from their social worker should they live more than two hours from their agency or cohabitate with other people, even in an emergency, which limits many families' ability to immediately move out of the area where there may be more resources. Due to these limitations, having access to immediate assistance during a disaster becomes an acute necessity for resource families who house foster youth.

According to the Author

"[This bill] 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."

Arguments in Support

According to co-sponsor, Children Now, "The state is legally responsible for meeting the needs of children and youth in foster care, which is particularly critical in the immediate aftermath of a natural disaster. Despite the state's legal responsibility to support these children and youth, there is no dedicated funding available to cover extra, unexpected costs, including replacing lost belongings, securing temporary housing, or traveling between a temporary home and appointments or school."

Arguments in Opposition

No opposition on file.

FISCAL COMMENTS

According to the Senate Appropriations Committee on August 29, 2025:

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

VOTES:

ASM HUMAN SERVICES: 7-0-0

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

ASM APPROPRIATIONS: 14-0-1

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

ABS, ABST OR NV: Sanchez

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 79-0-0

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

SENATE FLOOR: 40-0-0

YES: Allen, Alvarado-Gil, Archuleta, Arreguín, Ashby, Becker, Blakespear, Cabaldon, Caballero, Cervantes, Choi, Cortese, Dahle, Durazo, Gonzalez, Grayson, Grove, Hurtado, Jones, Laird, Limón, McGuire, McNerney, Menjivar, Niello, Ochoa Bogh, Padilla, Pérez, Reyes, Richardson, Rubio, Seyarto, Smallwood-Cuevas, Stern, Strickland, Umberg, Valladares, Wahab, Weber Pierson, Wiener

UPDATED

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