
THIRD READING

Bill No: AB 779
Author: Lackey (R), et al.
Amended: 6/11/25 in Senate
Vote: 21

SENATE HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE: 5-0, 6/30/25
AYES: Arreguín, Ochoa Bogh, Becker, Limón, Pérez

SENATE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE: Senate Rule 28.8

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 73-0, 5/23/25 - See last page for vote

SUBJECT: Child welfare services: domestic violence consultant pilot program

SOURCE: Author

DIGEST: This bill (1) allows a county child welfare agency to establish a three-year pilot program in which the county partners with a domestic violence consultant from a domestic violence victim service organization to offer support and guidance to county social workers and direct support to parent survivors. (2) Requires counties that establish such a program to conduct a comprehensive evaluation of the pilot program and report its findings to the Legislature on or before October 31, 2031.

ANALYSIS:

Existing Law:

- 1) Establishes a system of juvenile dependency for children for specific 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. (Welfare and Institutions Code (WIC) § 300 et seq.)
- 2) Defines “domestic violence counselor” as a person who is employed by a domestic violence victim service organization, as defined, whether financially

compensated or not, for the purpose of rendering advice or assistance to victims of domestic violence and who has at least 40 hours of training, as specified. (Evidence Code § 1037.1)

- 3) Defines “domestic violence victim service organization” to mean either of the following:
 - a) A nongovernmental organization or entity that provides shelter, programs, or services to victims of domestic violence and their children, including, but not limited to, either of the following:
 - i) Domestic violence shelter-based programs.
 - ii) Other programs with the primary mission to provide services to victims of domestic violence whether or not that program exists in an agency that provides additional services.
 - b) Programs on the campus of a public or private institution of higher education with the primary mission to provide support or advocacy services to victims of domestic violence. (Evidence Code § 1037.1)

This Bill:

- 1) Allows a county child welfare agency to establish a three-year pilot program in which the county partners with a domestic violence consultant from a domestic violence victim service organization, to offer support and guidance to county social workers in addressing the complex dynamics of families who are potentially experiencing both domestic violence and child maltreatment in order to enhance the social worker’s knowledge of domestic violence and their ability to apply that knowledge to their work with parent survivors and their children through tailored engagement and intervention strategies.
- 2) Provides that under the pilot program, the domestic violence consultant shall assist county social workers by doing, at a minimum, all of the following:
 - a) Provide education on domestic violence-related dynamics and services.
 - b) Discuss complicating factors, including, but not limited to, children witnessing or experiencing violence during domestic violence incidents, homelessness, and substance and alcohol use.

- c) Discuss protective measures, including, but not limited to, implementing safety plans or restraining orders to protect parent survivors and their children, and child removal from homes affected by domestic violence.
 - d) Offer recommendations for accessing resources for families.
 - e) Navigate law enforcement responses to reports of domestic violence.
- 3) Provides that the domestic violence consultant may also provide direct support to parent survivors by facilitating shelter access, referring their children to therapy, and providing information on other resources.
- 4) Provides that if a county implements the pilot program, the county shall conduct a comprehensive evaluation of the pilot program and report its findings to the Legislature on or before October 31, 2031.
- 5) Requires a participating county to seek the input of the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) and stakeholders, including people with lived experience with domestic violence and child welfare, in the design and implementation of the evaluation.
- 6) Requires the report to include, but not be limited to, all of the following:
- a) Data on each instance when safety plans or restraining orders were implemented in homes affected by domestic violence and the outcomes for each family utilizing protective measures.
 - b) Data on the recommendations provided to families who were identified as needing to access resources and the outcomes of their use.
 - c) Data on law enforcement responses to each report of domestic violence.
- 7) Repeals this section as of January 1, 2032.

Comments

According to the author, “AB 779 addresses systemic gaps in the child welfare system and improves outcomes for families by establishing a three-year pilot program for counties to partner with domestic violence service providers to offer support and guidance to social workers handling cases involving both abuse and child maltreatment. Enhancing the child welfare system’s capacity to respond to domestic violence effectively is vital to ensuring the safety, well-being, and long-term stability of both children and their families.”

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.

Generally, if a child cannot be safely returned home after the time allotted for reunification services ends, the court terminates the parental rights of the child's parents. The child's case plan then focuses on permanency services, in an effort to connect the child to a permanent placement through adoption or guardianship. If an adoption or guardianship is not established, a child may remain in long-term foster care. The child is always supposed to be placed in the most family like setting, with short-term residential treatment programs used only as necessary to provide intensive services. A child remains eligible for services for the length of their time in the child welfare system, time limits relate to the provision of services to the child's parents.

In some circumstances, existing law allows the court to not provide reunification services at all, and parental rights are terminated without the opportunity for reunification. These circumstances include, but are not limited to, the following

examples: when the whereabouts of the parent are unknown; when the parent is suffering from a mental disability, as provided, that renders the parent incapable of utilizing those services; when the parent caused the death of another child through abuse or neglect; after a finding of severe sexual abuse; when the parent has been convicted of a violent felony, as provided; and in some instances where a prior child of the parent became a dependent of the court and was unable to reunify.

Antelope Valley Program to Address Domestic Violence in Dependency Cases. Domestic violence is incredibly prevalent in dependency cases. In 2020, over 50% of the 38,618 open cases in Los Angeles County had past or current concerns of domestic violence identified by caseworkers. It is not only perpetrators of domestic violence that find their children brought into the dependency system. Victims of domestic violence also may have their children removed under a failure to protect finding.

The University of California Los Angeles (UCLA) Pritzker Center for Strengthening Children and Families (Pritzker Center) unites a multidisciplinary network across the UCLA campus and throughout Los Angeles County to identify strategies to reduce the need for foster care while supporting equitable reform to the child welfare center. This bill is built upon a collaboration which began in 2020 between the Pritzker Center and stakeholders in Los Angeles County and a subsequent report that explored the role of domestic violence in the child welfare system. From this work, a collaboration¹ between Valley Oasis and the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services Lancaster Regional Office began. Their study began in the Antelope Valley in January 2023 with a focus on documenting the experience of parent survivors of domestic violence, domestic violence service providers, and child welfare staff; developing a collaborative response to these experiences; and evaluating the interventions implemented. The study found that survivors of domestic violence struggle with numerous barriers in child welfare cases, including:

- Complex Trauma – Parent survivors of domestic violence often experience trauma, leading to pervasive fear and mistrust.
- Isolation in Navigation – parent survivors of domestic violence are often expected to navigate their cases and complex systems alone.
- Power Dynamics – child welfare staff can unintentionally reproduce patterns of power and control.

¹ <https://pritzkercenter.ucla.edu/collaborative-reform-in-child-welfare-for-families-experiencing-dv/>

- Lack of Differentiation – domestic violence and high-conflict relationships are often treated as the same, leading to inadequate responses to unique situations.
- Racial Bias – parent survivors from marginalized communities face additional challenges due to racial bias.
- Secondary Traumatic Stress – child welfare workers and service providers may experience secondary traumatic stress which can impact their ability to provide effective assistance.

The study found that collaboration between child welfare staff and domestic violence service providers improved support for parent survivors and their children. Numerous recommendations were made in the report, including: enhance and scale collaborative efforts; refine domestic violence referrals; advance organizational culture change; strengthen responses to secondary traumatic stress; address financial barriers for survivors; enhance emergency housing safety and increase capacity; and invigorate domestic violence programming. This bill seeks to build on this program by allowing a county child welfare agency to establish a three-year pilot program based on this collaboration and study.

Related/Prior Legislation:

SB 537 (Rubio, 2022) would have required CDSS to convene a workgroup to examine, and produce a report on, the intersection of the child welfare system and domestic violence and the impacts of child welfare policy on families experiencing domestic violence. This bill was placed on the Senate Inactive File.

AB 2030 (Limon, Chapter 485, Statutes of 2018) requires CDSS to include, in certain public social services application and redetermination forms, questions regarding the need for accommodation related to disability or domestic violence.

AB 557 (Rubio, Chapter 691, Statutes of 2017) made the California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKs) homeless assistance benefits available to applicants who are past or present victims of domestic violence, as specified, and makes other changes to the CalWORKs program specific to victims of domestic violence. AB 557 also required CDSS to report annually to the Legislature data on welfare-to-work recipients who have been identified as potential victims of domestic violence.

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

SUPPORT: (Verified 7/15/25)

All for Kids

California Alliance of Child and Family Services

County of Los Angeles Board of Supervisors

County Welfare Directors Association of California

OPPOSITION: (Verified 7/15/25)

None received

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 73-0, 5/23/25

AYES: Addis, Aguiar-Curry, Ahrens, Alanis, Alvarez, Arambula, Ávila Farías, Bains, Bauer-Kahan, Bennett, Berman, Boerner, Bonta, Calderon, Caloza, Carrillo, Castillo, 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, Ortega, Pacheco, Papan, Patel, Patterson, Pellerin, Petrie-Norris, Quirk-Silva, Ramos, Ransom, Celeste Rodriguez, Michelle Rodriguez, Rogers, Blanca Rubio, Schiavo, Schultz, Solache, Soria, Stefani, Ta, Tangipa, Valencia, Wallis, Ward, Wilson, Zbur, Rivas

NO VOTE RECORDED: Bryan, Chen, Nguyen, Sanchez, Sharp-Collins, Wicks

Prepared by: Heather Hopkins / HUMAN S. / (916) 651-1524

7/15/25 16:21:43

**** **END** ****