

CONCURRENCE IN SENATE AMENDMENTS

AB 779 (Lackey)

As Amended June 11, 2025

Majority vote

SUMMARY

Authorizes counties 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. Requires participating counties to seek the input of the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) in the design and implementation of the evaluation of the pilot program.

Senate Amendments

Reduce the duration of the pilot program from five years to three years.

COMMENTS

Background: Local Domestic Violence Consultant Program. The provisions of *this bill* expand the locally operated Antelope Valley Domestic Violence Consultant Program to apply to additional regional child welfare offices across the state as a pilot program. The original program partnered the Los Angeles (LA) Department of Child and Family Services (DCFS) offices with local domestic violence service providers to ensure that families experiencing domestic violence receive specialized, trauma-informed support.

Based on the success of this local program, *this bill* seeks to improve outcomes for children and families who are experiencing domestic violence in California by ensuring child welfare workers have specialized domestic violence consultants to guide interventions, provide trauma-informed services, and help keep families safely together when possible. Survivors would gain better access to shelters, legal protections, and support services, while their children would receive improved stability, and protections as well. The author is seeking to address systemic gaps in the child welfare system, by enhancing the capacity of social workers to respond to domestic violence in a way that prioritizes family stability and well-being.

The University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) Pritzker Center launched a pilot study in 2023 in partnership with Valley Oasis, a community-based organization, and Lancaster DCFS as a response to findings from a 2020 report that examined the intersection of domestic violence and the child welfare system in LA County. The pilot study was conducted to respond to recommendations in the 2020 report.

The study focused on the Antelope Valley in part due to emergency room visits prompted by domestic violence being highest in the Antelope Valley compared to other parts of LA County from 2010-2014 (LA Domestic Violence Council, 2020). According to the report, strained service systems struggled to provide timely services to families experiencing domestic violence and the child welfare system in the Antelope Valley. The study showed that survivors of domestic violence struggled against numerous barriers in child welfare cases, including complex trauma, isolation in navigation, power dynamics, lack of differentiation, racial bias, secondary traumatic stress, financial strain, housing shortages, limited resources/transit, and service gaps

for children. However, the study showed that collaboration between child welfare staff and domestic violence service providers improved support for parent survivors and their children.

Training resulted in significant knowledge gains about domestic violence, and consultation improved the application of domestic violence knowledge and intervention strategies.

Among the recommendations provided by the UCLA Pritzker Center was the recommendation to enhance and scale collaborative efforts by fostering an ongoing partnership between Lancaster DCFS and Valley Oasis, and strategically scale similar collaborations throughout LA County to maximize impact.

Parent survivors of domestic violence are often expected to navigate their cases and complex systems alone and child welfare staff can unintentionally reproduce patterns of power and control. *This bill* would authorize any county to establish a three-year pilot program to partner 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.

Failure to Protect. The current definition of abuse/neglect contains a "failure to protect" provision that states a child could be a dependent of the court if the child has suffered, or there is a substantial risk that the child will suffer, serious physical harm or illness, as a result of the failure or inability of their parent to adequately supervise or protect the child, or the willful or negligent failure of the child's parent to adequately supervise or protect the child from the conduct of the custodian with whom the child has been left, or by the willful or negligent failure of the parent or guardian to provide the child with adequate food, clothing, shelter, or medical treatment, or by the inability of the parent or guardian to provide regular care for the child due to the parent's or guardian's mental illness, developmental disability, or substance abuse.

"Failure to protect" statutes insinuate the survivor is the problem, according to a May 2021 UCLA Pritzker Center report, while shifting the burden away from the person who creates the harm to account for the violence in the relationship. In a UCLA Pritzker Center survey, 88% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that survivors of domestic violence who stay with the person who perpetrates the harm may risk losing custody of their children due to "failure to protect." The study notes that in conversations with survivor advocates and lawyers, they highlighted the ways in which child neglect framed as failure to protect faults the survivor and fails to acknowledge the barriers a survivor must overcome to leave a domestic violence situation. There is a myriad of personal, cultural, financial, and social obstacles that inhibit a victim's ability to leave their perpetrator. Some of these obstacles include fear of retaliation, lack of economic resources, immigration concerns, language barriers which prevent access to supportive services, isolation forced by the person who is controlling the survivor and thus a lack of a support network, and hope that one's partner will change. As noted in the report, a victim's perceived "inaction" is often the result of a calculation to maximize both the safety of the child and victim.

This bill would address the complexities of these issues by requiring the domestic violence consultant to assist social workers in discussing protective measures such as implementing safety

plans or restraining orders as a way to protect parent survivors and their children, and to prevent child removal from homes affected by domestic violence.

Equity Implications: The provisions of *this bill* seek to address inequities in the child welfare system by improving accessibility to specialized domestic violence services for those experiencing domestic violence and their children. Currently, survivors may face allegations of neglect due to abusive conditions imposed by another household member, often leading to child removals that cause further trauma. The UCLA Pritzker study stated that parent survivors from marginalized communities face additional challenges due to racial bias. While it is sometimes necessary to remove a child, finding ways to support and give resources to families to help them stay together is critical to the intent of the Legislature to maintain the continuity of the family unit and ensure the preservation and strengthening of the child's family ties.

According to the Author

"[This bill] is a step toward ensuring that survivors of domestic violence and their children receive the support they need to stay safe and together. Too often, survivors are unfairly penalized by the child welfare system when they are already in vulnerable situations. By expanding the Antelope Valley's successful Domestic Violence Consultant Program, we can provide specialized guidance to child welfare workers, prevent unnecessary family separations, and connect survivors to life-saving resources."

Arguments in Support

According to the California Alliance of Child and Family Services, "The goal of the partnership is to develop proactive intervention strategies to enhance social worker's knowledge of domestic violence and their skillset to apply those principles to the services they provide to parent survivors and their children."

Arguments in Opposition

No opposition on file.

FISCAL COMMENTS

According to the Senate Appropriations Committee, pursuant to Senate Rule 28.8, the June 11, 2025, version of this bill would result in negligible state costs.

VOTES:

ASM HUMAN SERVICES: 6-0-1

YES: Lee, Castillo, Calderon, Elhawary, Celeste Rodriguez, Tangipa

ABS, ABST OR NV: Jackson

ASM APPROPRIATIONS: 15-0-0

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

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 73-0-6

YES: 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

ABS, ABST OR NV: Bryan, Chen, Nguyen, Sanchez, Sharp-Collins, Wicks

SENATE FLOOR: 39-0-1

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, Richardson, Rubio, Seyarto, Smallwood-Cuevas, Stern, Strickland, Umberg, Valladares, Wahab, Weber Pierson, Wiener

ABS, ABST OR NV: Reyes

UPDATED

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