
SENATE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Senator Anna Caballero, Chair
2025 - 2026 Regular Session

AB 896 (Elhawary) - Foster care: placement transition planning

Version: March 17, 2025
Urgency: No
Hearing Date: June 30, 2025

Policy Vote: HUMAN S. 5 - 0
Mandate: Yes
Consultant: Agnes Lee

Bill Summary: AB 896 would require county child welfare agencies to adopt a policy for supporting foster children who are transitioning between placement settings and who are transitioning from foster care to reunification.

Fiscal Impact:

- The California Department of Social Services (CDSS) estimates a one-time contract cost of \$300,000 (General Fund) for updated design, translation, printing and distribution of materials related to the list of rights for foster youth.
- Unknown General Fund costs to fund counties to adopt policies required under the bill. 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.

Background: Under the child welfare services (CWS) system, social workers in each county receive reports of abuse or neglect, and investigate and resolve those reports. 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.

Current law requires that prior to making a change in the foster care placement of a child or youth, a social worker or probation officer must develop with the caregiver a placement preservation strategy, which must be done in consultation with the child and family team, as specified, to preserve the child's or youth's foster care placement. The strategy may include, but is not limited to, conflict resolution practices and facilitated

meetings. The strategy must include a referral by the social worker or probation officer to a qualified individual for an assessment, as required in existing law, if the next placement is anticipated to be in a short-term residential therapeutic program or in an out-of-state residential facility.

Proposed Law: Specific provisions of the bill would:

- Add to the existing foster care youth list of rights, the right to be involved in the development of their own placement transition planning.
- Require each county child welfare agency to adopt a policy for supporting foster children who are transitioning between placement settings and who are transitioning from foster care to reunification; and require the placement transition planning policy to include both of the following components:
 - Ensure that foster children are provided the opportunity to provide input on their placement transition, as developmentally and age-appropriate and ensure that the child's current or most recent caregiver also has input into the transition needs of the child.
 - Provide guidance to social workers for obtaining input and sharing information in placement transition planning and incorporating the planning into case plans in such a way as to support the strengths and needs of children and to reduce trauma and any psychological, cultural, developmental, relational, spiritual, or emotional harm to the foster child.
- Require that in developing the placement transition policy, the county child welfare agency must consult with foster youth and caregivers to create a placement transition policy, as specified.
- Require CDSS, in consultation with counties that have implemented placement transition planning and with other stakeholders who have placement transition planning expertise, to issue guidance to county child welfare agencies to describe best practices and strategies for successful placement transition planning.
- Require a county child welfare agency to submit to CDSS its placement transition planning policy, no later than one year after the department has issued its guidance and provided funding to counties to develop their placement transition planning policies.

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