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THIRD READING

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Bill No: AB 896  
Author: Elhawary (D), et al.  
Amended: 8/29/25 in Senate  
Vote: 21

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SENATE HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE: 5-0, 6/16/25

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

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

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

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 69-0, 5/15/25 (Consent) - See last page for vote

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**SUBJECT:** Foster care: placement transition planning

**SOURCE:** County Welfare Directors Association of California, Youth Law Center

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**DIGEST:** This bill requires each county child welfare agency to adopt a policy for supporting foster children who are transitioning between placement settings and transitioning from foster care to reunification. Requires the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) to issue guidance to county child welfare agencies to describe best practices and strategies for successful placement transition planning.

**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 have been abused or neglected, as specified. (Welfare and Institutions Code [WIC] 202)

- 2) States that the purpose of foster care law is to provide maximum safety and protection for children who are currently being physically, sexually, or emotionally abused, neglected, or exploited, and to ensure the safety, protection, and physical and emotional well-being of children who are at risk of harm. (WIC 300.2)
- 3) States the intent of the Legislature to preserve and strengthen a child's family ties whenever possible, and to reunify a foster youth with their biological family whenever possible, or to provide a permanent placement alternative, such as adoption or guardianship. (WIC 16000)
- 4) Establishes the Foster Youth Bill of Rights which enumerates 41 separate rights of minors and nonminors in foster care, including but not limited to, the right to: live in a safe, healthy, and comfortable home where they are treated with respect; be free from physical, sexual, emotional, or other abuse, corporal punishment, or exploitation; receive adequate and healthy food, clothing, and, age appropriate allowance; be placed in the least restrictive setting possible; have a placement that utilizes trauma-informed and evidence-based de-escalation and intervention techniques; receive medical, dental, vision, mental health, and substance use disorder services, and reproductive and sexual health care; have a caregiver, child welfare and probation personnel, and legal counsel who have received instruction on cultural competency and sensitivity relating to sexual orientation, and gender identity and expression; attend religious services and activities of their choice; be involved in the development of their own case plan and plan for permanent placement; review their own case plan and plan for permanent placement if they are 10 years of age or older, and receive information about their out-of-home placement and case plan, including being told of changes to the plan; and, be provided with contact information for the Ombudsperson at the time of each placement, and be free from threats or punishment for making complaints. (WIC 16001.9)
- 5) Provides that prior to making a change in the foster care placement of a child or youth, a social worker or probation officer shall develop with the caregiver a placement preservation strategy, which shall be done in consultation with the child and family team to preserve the child's or youth's foster care placement. Provides that if, after implementing the placement preservation strategy, the social worker or probation officer receives a placement change request from the caregiver or provider, or otherwise finds that a foster care placement change is necessary, the social worker, probation officer, or placement agency shall serve written notice on all of the following parties at least 14 calendar days prior to

the change: the child's parent or guardian; the child's caregiver; the child's attorney and the child, if the child is 10 years of age or older. (WIC 16010.7)

- 6) Requires CDSS to implement the Resource Family Approval (RFA) process as a unified, family friendly, and child-centered process to replace the existing multiple processes for licensing foster family homes, certifying foster homes by licensed foster family agencies, approving relatives and nonrelative extended family members as foster care providers, and approving guardians and adoptive families. (WIC 16519.5(a))

This Bill:

- 1) Makes Legislative findings and declarations regarding the impact of changes in placement and the importance of transition plans for children in out-of-home care.
- 2) Adds to the foster care bill of rights the right to be involved in their placement transition planning.
- 3) Provides that if a child's placement cannot be preserved, the social worker shall ensure that there is appropriate placement transition planning, consistent with the county placement transition planning policy.
- 4) Provides that each county child welfare agency shall adopt a policy for supporting foster children who are transitioning between placement settings and who are transitioning from foster care to reunification. The placement transition planning policy shall both:
  - a) 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; and
  - b) 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.
- 5) Provides that in developing the placement transition policy, the county child welfare agency shall consult with foster youth, caregivers, and tribes to create a placement transition policy that includes all of the following:

- a) Consideration of a child's educational, medical, mental health, religious or faith-based, cultural, dietary, extracurricular and social, and developmental needs.
  - b) How to maintain permanent connections for the child, including supporting relationships with relatives, friends, and in the case of an Indian child, extended family members and the child's tribe, and other individuals who are important to the child, and continuity in health care, education, child daycare, extracurricular and social activities, and other community involvement.
  - c) How transitions will be managed, including timing, preparation for the move, such as visits or contact with the current and new care providers, ensuring the child has all of their possessions, how the child will be transported to the new placement, and how the child can participate in scheduled upcoming events and activities.
  - d) How the social worker will ensure that the transition plan is carried out as designed and how any necessary adjustments will occur and be communicated.
  - e) The designation of an individual who will communicate with the child, and in the case of an Indian child, the child's tribe, throughout the transition process to ensure the child understands what is happening and who is involved in decision making.
- 6) Provides that CDSS, in consultation with counties that have implemented placement transition planning and with other stakeholders who have placement transition planning expertise, shall issue guidance to county child welfare agencies to describe best practices and strategies for successful placement transition planning.
- 7) Provides that a county child welfare agency shall submit to CDSS its placement transition planning policy, via email or other correspondence, no later than one year after CDSS has issued its guidance and provided funding to counties to develop their placement transition planning policies.
- 8) Adds to the requirements of what a resource family shall demonstrate to include working cooperatively with the birth family, as appropriate and other resource families and expands that this cooperative work should include supporting transitions in placement settings or permanency.

- 9) Adds to the training topics required to be included in the at minimum 12-hour training a resource family applicant completes: the role of other resource families and other service providers in implementing the case plan; supporting case plan goals and objectives; and including placement transition planning to reduce trauma during transitions to reunification or other placement settings.
- 10) To the extent that this act has an overall effect of increasing the costs already borne by a local agency for programs or levels of service mandated by the 2011 Realignment Legislation within the meaning of Section 36 of Article XIII of the California Constitution, it shall apply to local agencies only to the extent that the state provides annual funding for the cost increase. Any new program or higher level of service provided by a local agency pursuant to this act above the level for which funding has been provided shall not require a subvention of funds by the state or otherwise be subject to Section 6 of Article XIII B of the California Constitution.

## Comments

*According to the author.* “AB 896 ensures foster children have a voice in their placement transitions by requiring counties to establish clear policies that prioritize stability and individual needs. Currently, no statewide guidelines exist to manage these transitions, leading to frequent disruptions, emotional distress, and loss of important relationships. This bill mandates that counties develop transition policies with input from foster children (or their representatives) and include current caregivers in the decision-making process. By standardizing and personalizing transitions, AB 896 aims to reduce trauma, improve stability, and create a more supportive foster care system.”

*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.

*Placement Changes and Impact on Foster Youth.* Youth who enter foster care face not only the trauma and loss of being removed from their home, but also trauma and loss from instability in their foster care placements. In 2023, 26.1% of youth in foster care had three or more placements in a 12 month period, as did 30.6% in 2022. For youth in foster care for 24 months, in 2023 42.2% had three or more

placements in that time. These changes in placement have a deep impact on youth. Research has shown changes in placement can increase behavior problems, mental health issues, and neural development. When placement changes are unplanned or inadequately planned, the result is a child thrust into unfamiliarity of location, family, and home. Not only is the placement itself fraught with unfamiliarity, these moves can result in children losing touch with previous caregivers, relatives, friends and other people who are important to them. There is often also disruption to health care, education, community involvement and extracurricular activities.

Carefully planned transitions are not currently the norm in California. Surveys of resource families who had experienced recent non-emergency transitions conducted in several counties participating in the Quality Parenting Initiative over the past five years found that:<sup>1</sup>

- Between 33% and 71% of families experienced unplanned transitions.
- Between 25% and 72% had less than 14 days' notice that a move was contemplated.
- Fewer than 35% of families who were receiving a foster child or youth from a prior placement, received necessary information on educational and developmental needs.

This bill seeks to address this issue by mandating that each child welfare agency adopt a policy for supporting foster children who are transitioning between placement settings and who are transitioning from foster care to reunification.

**Related/Prior Legislation:**

AB 2247 (Gipson, Chapter 674, Statutes of 2018), required a social worker or placement agency to implement a placement preservation strategy prior to changing a dependent child's placement, and required at least 14 days' written notice to be given prior to a placement change, except in instances where delayed placement or prior notice of a placement change would endanger a child's health or safety or where all specified parties have agreed to waive these requirements.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://cdss.ca.gov/inforesources/caregiver-advocacy-network/quality-parenting-initiative>

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

According to the Senate Appropriations Committee analysis:

- Unknown one-time General Fund costs, likely low hundreds of thousands, for the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) for state administration.
- 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.

**SUPPORT:** (Verified 8/29/25)

County Welfare Directors Association of California (Co-source)

Youth Law Center (Co-Source)

Alliance for Children's Rights

American Academy of Pediatrics, California

California State Association of Counties

California State PTA

County of Kern

County of San Diego

**OPPOSITION:** (Verified 8/29/25)

None received

**ASSEMBLY FLOOR:** 69-0, 5/15/25

**AYES:** Addis, Aguiar-Curry, Ahrens, Alvarez, Ávila Farías, Bains, Bauer-Kahan, Berman, Boerner, Bonta, Bryan, Calderon, Carrillo, Chen, Connolly, Davies, DeMaio, Dixon, Elhawary, Ellis, Flora, Fong, Gabriel, Gallagher, Garcia, Gipson, Mark González, Hadwick, Haney, Harabedian, Hoover, Irwin, Jackson, Kalra, Krell, Lackey, Lee, Lowenthal, Macedo, McKinnor, Muratsuchi, Nguyen, Ortega, Pacheco, Papan, Patel, Patterson, Pellerin, Petrie-Norris, Ransom, Celeste Rodriguez, Michelle Rodriguez, Rogers, Blanca Rubio, Sanchez, Schiavo, Schultz, Sharp-Collins, Solache, Soria, Ta, Tangipa, Valencia, Wallis, Ward, Wicks, Wilson, Zbur, Rivas



NO VOTE RECORDED: Alanis, Arambula, Bennett, Caloza, Castillo, Jeff  
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