

Date of Hearing: June 24, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Buffy Wicks, Chair

SB 1051 (Menjivar) – As Introduced February 12, 2026

Policy Committee: Human Services

Vote: 7 - 0

Urgency: No

State Mandated Local Program: No

Reimbursable: No

SUMMARY:

This bill, for purposes of the Emergency Childcare Bridge Program for Foster Children (Bridge Program), authorizes a resource and referral (R&R) program childcare navigator to refer a foster child to a county welfare department for eligibility determination and approval and requires the county welfare department to determine eligibility of a child referred from a childcare navigator.

FISCAL EFFECT:

The California Department of Social Services indicates absorbable costs, if any.

Because the Bridge Program is a county-optional program, any costs incurred by counties resulting from this bill are not reimbursable by the state.

COMMENTS:

1) **Purpose.** According to the author:

When foster families and parenting youth call [R&R] agencies seeking childcare, they are connected with a Bridge Navigator who can direct them to available resources. While they can certainly share the information, there is no direct coordination pathway to work with the county child welfare to help streamline approval of this childcare voucher. [This bill] would empower Bridge Navigators, who are well-positioned within R&R agencies, to submit referrals to county child welfare agencies to obtain approval for a childcare voucher for an eligible foster child under the Bridge Program. It will streamline and strengthen the original intent of the Bridge Program by ensuring lack of access to childcare is not a barrier to keeping children in safe, stable family homes.

2) **Background.** The 2017 Budget Act established the Bridge Program as a county-optional program for the purpose of stabilizing a foster child with a resource family at the time of placement by providing a time-limited payment or voucher for childcare following the child's placement and by providing the resource family with a childcare navigator to assist the family in accessing long-term subsidized childcare. These services make it easier for caregivers to take in a child on an emergency or temporary basis. The Bridge Program is not

an entitlement program and is funded through the state budget outside of other childcare programs. In fiscal year 2024-25, 48 counties had opted into the Bridge Program.

Childcare R&R programs serve defined geographic areas and states law requires they provide childcare navigator services to families participating in the Bridge Program to assess childcare opportunities appropriate to the child's age and needs, assist the family in identifying potential opportunities for an ongoing childcare subsidy, and develop a long-term childcare plan for the child. R&R programs must provide childcare navigator services to any child in foster care or involved in the child welfare system, including any child who meets the eligibility criteria for the Bridge Program.

The sponsors and author assert that overwhelmed or inexperienced county child welfare staff often forget to inform families about the Bridge Program and say that because only social workers can initiate the voucher process, eligible families are frequently left without childcare assistance.

To streamline eligibility determinations for the Bridge Program, this bill allows a Bridge Program childcare navigator to directly refer a foster child to a county welfare department, rather than only providing information to the resource family or relying on the social worker to initiate the process and requires the department to determine the eligibility of the referred child.

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