Office of Senate Floor Analyses
(916) 651-4171

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Bill No: SB 1051
Author: Menjivar (D), et al.
Amended: 8/21/26
Vote: 21

SENATE HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE: 5-0, 4/6/26
AYES: Becker, Ochoa Bogh, Laird, Pérez, Weber Pierson

SENATE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE: Senate Rule 28.8

SENATE FLOOR: 37-0, 4/23/26 (Consent)
AYES: 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, Padilla, Pérez, Richardson, Rubio, Seyarto, Smallwood-Cuevas, Stern, Strickland, Umberg, Valladares, Weber Pierson, Wiener
NO VOTE RECORDED: Ochoa Bogh, Reyes, Wahab

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: Passed, 8/25/26

SUBJECT: Foster care: childcare

SOURCE: Alliance for Children's Rights
Child Care Resource Center

DIGEST: This bill authorizes a child care navigator to refer a foster child to the county welfare department for eligibility and approval under the Emergency Child Care Bridge Program for Foster Children (Bridge Program) and requires a county welfare department to determine eligibility of a child referred from a child care navigator.

Assembly Amendments add double jointing language with AB 2478 to avoid chaptering out issues.

ANALYSIS:

Existing law:

1) Establishes the Bridge Program as a county opt-in program with the purpose of stabilizing foster children with families at the time of placement by providing a time-limited payment or voucher for child care following the child's placement and providing the family with a child care navigator to assist the family in accessing long-term subsidized child care. (Welfare and Institutions Code [WIC] § 11461.6)

2) Authorizes payments to be provided either directly to the family or child care provider, or through a contract with a local Alternative Payment program to distribute vouchers for child care. (WIC § 11461.6(c))

3) Requires participating county welfare departments to determine eligibility of a child for the Bridge Program using the following criteria:

   a) A family placement eligible to receive payment or a voucher for child care includes both of the following:

      i) Approved resource families and families that have a child placed with them in an emergency or for a compelling reason, as specified.

      ii) Parents under the jurisdiction of the juvenile court, including, but not limited to, nonminor dependent parents.

   b) A participating county welfare department may provide a payment or voucher if work or school responsibilities preclude resource families from providing care under certain circumstances, as specified. (WIC § 11461.6(d))

4) Provides that each child receiving a monthly child care payment or voucher shall be provided with a child care navigator who shall work directly with the child's family, social worker, and the child and family team to assist in accessing child care at the time of placement as well as long-term, subsidized child care for the child, as necessary. (WIC § 11461.6(e))

5) Provides that child care resource and referral (R&R) programs, established to serve a defined geographic area, shall provide a common set of services. Requires child care R&R programs to be provided to all persons requesting services and all types of child care providers, regardless of income level or other eligibility criteria. (WIC § 102219 and 10222)

6) Requires R&R programs to provide a common set of services, including, but not limited to, provision of a child care navigator to support children in foster care and children of parents involved in the child welfare system, among others. Provides that a child care navigator shall work with the child's family, child's social worker, and the child and family team to assess child care opportunities appropriate to the child's age and needs, assist the family in identifying potential opportunities for an ongoing child care subsidy, assist the caregiver in completing appropriate child care program applications, and develop an overall, long-term child care plan for the child. (WIC § 10219(5)(A)(i))

7) Requires each R&R program to develop and enter into a memorandum of understanding, contract, or other formal agreement with the county child welfare agency in order to facilitate interagency communication and, to the maximum extent possible, to leverage federal funding to enhance navigation support. Alternatively allows an R&R program to explain in writing, annually, why entering into a formal agreement with the county child welfare agency is not practical or feasible. (WIC § 10219(5)(A)(ii))

This bill:

1) Authorizes a child care navigator to refer foster children to the county welfare department for eligibility and approval under the Bridge Program.

2) Requires a county welfare department to determine eligibility of a child referred from a child care navigator for the Bridge Program.

3) Adds double jointing language with AB 2478 to avoid chaptering out issues.

Background

Purpose of the Bill. According to the author, "When foster families and parenting youth call Resource and Referral agencies seeking child care, 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 child care voucher. Senate Bill 1051 would empower Bridge Navigators, who are well-positioned within Resource and Referral agencies, to submit referrals to county child welfare agencies to obtain approval for a child care voucher for an eligible foster child under the Emergency Child Care Bridge Program. It will streamline and strengthen the original intent of the Bridge Program by ensuring lack of access to child care is not a barrier to keeping children in safe, stable family home."

Emergency Child Care Bridge Program for Foster Children. The 2017 Budget Act established the Bridge Program to address child care as a barrier to placing foster children with relative and nonrelative caregivers (rather than placement in group homes). The Bridge Program is funded outside of other child care programs to provide a time-limited child care voucher for resource families at the time of a child's placement. Resource families are also provided with a child care navigator (located at an R&R program) to assist the family in accessing long-term subsidized child care. These supports make it easier for caregivers to take in a child on an emergency or temporary basis. In 2024–25, 48 counties were opted into the Bridge Program, and the program received funding to serve 5,537 children.

The Bridge Program is an opt-in program administered by county welfare departments in coordination with local Alternative Payment and R&R programs, both of which are often operated by the same child care agency. Participating county welfare departments must determine eligibility of a child based on whether the family is an approved resource family with a child placed with them in an emergency or the parents are under the jurisdiction of the juvenile court. Most participating county welfare departments choose to contract with a local Alternative Payment program agency to distribute child care vouchers. Additionally, each R&R program is required to contract with its local county welfare department to facilitate interagency communication, leverage federal funding, and enhance navigation support.

Navigator Services. Navigation or navigator services are a component of many social service programs. R&R programs are required to provide navigator services to families participating in the Bridge Program to assess child care opportunities appropriate to the child's age and needs, assist the family in identifying potential opportunities for an ongoing child care subsidy, and develop a long-term child care plan for the child. R&R programs must provide navigator services to any child in foster care or involved in the child welfare system, regardless of a child's receipt of a child care voucher.

This bill would authorize a child care navigator to refer foster children to the county welfare department for eligibility and approval under the Bridge Program and require a county welfare department to determine the eligibility of a child referred by a child care navigator. According to the co-sponsors, this bill would empower navigators to connect resource families to child care resources they are eligible for when those families go to an R&R program seeking information about child care.

Comments

This bill seeks to make eligibility determinations for the Bridge Program more accessible for resource families who are already eligible but not receiving services. R&R programs are already in contact with resource families to assist with their child care needs. Resource families may not be utilizing a Bridge Program child care voucher because they were not made aware of the program or because their need for child care arose later during the foster care placement. This bill would create a “no wrong door” approach for families to gain access the Bridge Program. County welfare department social workers would still retain the authority to determine eligibility.

Recent state budget actions have reverted unspent Bridge Program funding. Between 2017 and 2022, annual funding for the program grew from $31 million to $87 million to serve more resource families and expand allowable uses for counties to serve families with compelling needs. In 2024, the budget reverted $47 million from the prior year and reappropriated it to the 2024–25 fiscal year. In 2025, the budget reverted $30 million from 2024–25 and reduced Bridge Program funding by $30 million ongoing. By improving the referral process, this bill could increase the volume of already eligible families enrolled in the Bridge Program and reduce the amount of unspent program funding.

Related/Prior Legislation

AB 2478 (Schultz) would establish a Kinship Family Approval process within CDSS as a streamlined pathway for relatives, nonrelative extended family members, and extended family members of Indian children to become approved foster care providers. AB 2478 includes double jointing language with this bill. AB 2478 is pending on the Senate Floor.

SB 187 (Committee on Budget and Fiscal Review, Chapter 50, Statutes of 2022), a budget trailer bill, authorized a county welfare department, starting September 1, 2022, to extend eligibility for the Bridge Program monthly payment or voucher beyond 12 months based on a compelling reason that may include, but is not limited to, the inability of the foster child to successfully transition to other subsidized child care, the loss of the payment or voucher would jeopardize a successful reunification or permanency plan, or other reasons authorized pursuant to guidance issued by CDSS.

SB 89 (Committee on Budget and Fiscal Review, Chapter 24, Statutes of 2017), a budget trailer bill, established the Bridge Program as a county opt-in program, effective January 1, 2018.

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

According to the Assembly Appropriations Committee, "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."

SUPPORT: (Verified 8/25/26)

Child Care Resource Center, INC. (Co-source)
Alliance for Children's Rights (Co-Source)
California Alliance of Caregivers
California Alliance of Child and Family Services
California Child Care Resource & Referral Network
Child Action, INC.
Child Care Alliance of Los Angeles
Children Now
County Welfare Diretors Association of California
Crystal Stairs, INC.
Early Edge California
Everychild California
First 5 California
First 5 LA
Kidango
Pathways LA
Peach
Public Counsel
The Resource Connection
Thriving Families California

OPPOSITION: (Verified 8/25/26)

None received

Prepared by: Diana Dominguez / HUMAN S. / (916) 651-1524
8/25/26 16:27:28

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