SENATE THIRD READING
SB 1421 (McGuire)
As Amended August 13, 2026
Majority vote

SUMMARY

Requires the California Child and Family Service Review System (CFSR) to track how many nonminor dependents (NMDs) are using benefits designed to reduce poverty.

Major Provisions

1) Requires the California CFSR to include data measures related to the utilization of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and enrollment in postsecondary education and vocational education.

2) Adds those new measures to the comprehensive review of county performance that the state conducts at least once every five years.

3) Permits the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) to consider feedback from researchers, county representatives, advocates, and individuals with lived experience in determining which additional related measures to include.

COMMENTS

The California Child and Family Service Review System. California's child welfare system is state-supervised but county-administered, which means CDSS sets policy and the 58 counties deliver services. In 2001, through the enactment of the Child Welfare System Improvement and Accountability Act, AB 636 (Steinberg), Chapter 678, Statutes of 2001, the California CFSR was designed to keep this decentralized system accountable and replaced an older compliance structure that asked whether counties followed prescribed processes, in favor of an outcomes-based approach that asks whether children and families are actually safer and better served.

In practice, the review operates on a multi-year cycle. Each county completes a self-assessment of its own performance, including a qualitative peer review of cases, develops a multi-year system improvement plan, and submits annual progress reports against that plan. CDSS monitors county performance on an ongoing basis and conducts a comprehensive review of each county at least once every five years.

California's CFSR is modeled on and aligned with the federal CFSR, administered by the Children's Bureau within the United States (U.S.) Department of Health and Human Services. Federal funding for foster care and child welfare services is conditioned on each state operating an approved plan, and the federal review is the mechanism the federal government uses to test conformity with it.

The federal review evaluates states across the same broad outcome measures: safety, permanency, and well-being, together with a set of systemic factors such as case review, quality assurance, and the agency's responsiveness to the community. When a state is found out of conformity, they do not lose funding outright but instead enters into a program improvement plan with negotiated targets and timelines. California's review imports the federal measures and standards, and then layers state-specific indicators on top of them. *This bill* would add data measures on the extent to which NMDs use programs that are designed to reduce poverty and enrollment in postsecondary and vocational education. These new measures would be added to the comprehensive review of county performance that the state conducts at least once every five years.

This Bill in Practice. Currently, the California CFSR focuses on the federal safety, permanency, and well-being measures and on operational metrics like caseworker visits and the timeliness of abuse investigations. *This bill* extends the system into outcomes based on the utilization of programs designed to reduce poverty of older foster youth as they prepare to leave care. *This bill* asks the system to measure how many NMDs have completed the FAFSA, while leaving room for CDSS to add related anti-poverty and college-access measures over time. These new measures would then be attached to the existing every-five-year comprehensive county review, so they become part of the recurring accountability cycle rather than a one-time data pull.

A recent example comes from Los Angeles County, which voluntarily implemented the type of data collection proposed in *this bill*: the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) began tracking whether foster youth were receiving assistance with completing college financial aid applications (FAFSA/California Dream Act Application [CADAA]) as required by SB 12 (Beall), Chapter 722, Statutes of 2017. To support implementation, DCFS developed a dashboard that reported SB 12 compliance rates by Service Bureau. These data were reviewed regularly at both the Service Bureau and department-wide levels to identify performance disparities and focus corrective action where needed.

The result was a significant improvement in compliance with SB 12 and, in turn, an increase in college enrollment. Compliance rates increased from 1.7% in 2019 to 66.4% as of August 27, 2025, the most recent date for which aggregate data are available. During that same period, the number of foster youth enrolled in the 21 Los Angeles-based community colleges increased 44%, according to the California Community College Chancellor's Office. Notably, this growth occurred while Los Angeles County's foster care population declined by 38%, indicating that a substantially greater share of foster youth were enrolling in college.

By incorporating these measures into the California CFSR process, the state can ensure that counties routinely collect, review, and act on outcome data related to postsecondary access and success.

Free Application for Federal Student Aid is the single application students use to establish eligibility for federal student aid, which includes Pell Grants, federal work-study, and federal student loans, and for most state and institutional aid as well, including California's Cal Grant program. It is the gateway form that determines what aid a student can receive. The form is administered by Federal Student Aid, an office of the U.S. Department of Education, which develops, distributes, and processes roughly 22 million FAFSAs each year and enforces the underlying aid rules. In California, completion data for foster youth is tracked through a statewide initiative led by John Burton Advocates for Youth in partnership with the California Student Aid Commission (CSAC).

Foster youth qualify as independent students. The FAFSA asks whether the applicant was in foster care at any point since 13 years of age, and these youth generally do not have to report parental income, which removes a significant barrier for young people who are not in contact with their parents.[1] Completing the FAFSA is one of the strongest predictors of college-going high school seniors who complete it are roughly twice as likely to enroll within 12 months.[2] California's dedicated Foster Youth FAFSA/ CADAA Challenge, launched in 2017, raised foster-youth completion to 65% in the 2022-23 school year, up from 45% when the effort began. Foster youth remain far behind their peers for degree completion, with only about one in ten earning a college degree by their early-to-mid twenties.[3]

This bill would make FAFSA completion among NMDs a standing, county-level measure within the review system.

According to the Author
"[This bill] builds on California's obligation to track outcomes for young people in the state's child welfare system by addressing gaps in how outcomes for nonminor dependents are measured. Federal and state oversight mechanisms were largely designed prior to the expansion of foster care to age 21, and current review processes do not consistently capture outcomes for this population. [This bill] will require the inclusion of utilization data measures within the California Child and Family Service Review System related to nonminor dependents' use of resources such as the Free Application for Federal Student Aid and require the State Department of Social Services to conduct a comprehensive review of county performance on these measures every five years. Connection to these supports is crucial to education access and economic stability, and we owe it to every youth in extended foster care to ensure they have the best opportunity for upward mobility as they transition into adulthood."

Arguments in Support
The California Alliance of Child and Family Services writes, "When federal and state oversight mechanisms such as the California Child and Family Service Review System were designed, foster care had not yet been expanded to cover youths up to age 21. Since then, these systems have failed to consistently capture outcomes for this population. [This bill] will build on California's obligation to track outcomes for youths in the child welfare system by requiring the California Child and Family Service Review System to include data related to nonminor dependents' use of resources, like the Free Application for Federal Student Aid. It will also require the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) to conduct a comprehensive review of county performance on these measures every five years. Through these efforts, we will be able to track where youth in extended foster care are falling through the cracks and ensure they receive the support they need to thrive."

Arguments in Opposition
None on file.

FISCAL COMMENTS

According to the Assembly Appropriations Committee on August 13, 2026:

[1] https://www.urban.org/research/publication/foster-care-postsecondary-education-and-financial-aid-california
[2] https://jbay.org/financial-aid-results-2023/
[3] https://www.urban.org/research/publication/foster-care-postsecondary-education-and-financial-aid-california

1) CDSS estimates General Fund (GF) costs of $185,000 in fiscal year (FY) 2027-28 and ongoing GF costs of $181,000 annually for one position related to data collection activities.

2) CDSS estimates GF county costs of $3.7 million GF in FY 2027-28 and $2.6 million GF annually thereafter related to additional data measure requirements. These costs include:

    a) Ongoing county administrative costs of $1.3 million annually to collect the required data on NMDs and incorporate the data into system's county self-assessments, system improvement plans, and comprehensive reviews.

    b) Ongoing additional contract costs of $200,000 annually to update the existing California Child Welfare Indicators Project (CCWIP) contract with the University of California, Berkeley to include the required data.

    c) One-time automation costs of $1.1 million in FY 2027-28 to update the Child Welfare System – California Automated Response and Engagement System (CWS-CARES) to include the required data fields on program usage by NMDs.

VOTES

SENATE FLOOR: 33-0-7
YES: Archuleta, Arreguín, Ashby, Blakespear, Cabaldon, Caballero, Cervantes, Choi, Cortese, Dahle, Durazo, Gonzalez, Grayson, Grove, Jones, Laird, Limón, McGuire, McNerney, Menjivar, Ochoa Bogh, Pérez, Reyes, Richardson, Rubio, Seyarto, Smallwood-Cuevas, Strickland, Umberg, Valladares, Wahab, Weber Pierson, Wiener
ABS, ABST OR NV: Allen, Alvarado-Gil, Becker, Hurtado, Niello, Padilla, Stern

ASM HUMAN SERVICES: 7-0-0
YES: Lee, Tangipa, Calderon, Elhawary, Jackson, Celeste Rodriguez, Sanchez

ASM APPROPRIATIONS: 11-0-4
YES: Wicks, Arambula, Calderon, Caloza, Fong, Mark González, Krell, Pacheco, Pellerin, Sharp-Collins, Solache
ABS, ABST OR NV: Hoover, Dixon, Ta, Tangipa

UPDATED

VERSION: August 13, 2026

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