

SENATE THIRD READING

SB 534 (Padilla)

As Amended April 23, 2026

Majority vote

SUMMARY

Requires county welfare departments (counties) to provide the last known whereabouts of a foster youth's parents and siblings and the last known contact information for them, provided the youth did not decline the information.

Major Provisions

- 1) Requires counties, when it submits a report verifying that specified information, documents, and services have been provided to the foster youth at the final review hearing before the youth attains 18 years of age, and at the youth's subsequent review hearings as a nonminor dependent (NMD), to include as part of the family and placement history, the last known whereabouts of the youth's parents and siblings and their last known contact information, including telephone and cell phone numbers, physical address, email address, and any known social media accounts.
- 2) Permits the youth to decline this information.
- 3) *Adds provisions from AB 2764 of the current legislative session to avoid chaptering out conflicts.*

COMMENTS

Foster Youth and Their Records. Young people in foster care frequently lose track of parents, siblings, and other relatives during the years they spend in care. Placements change, contact lapses, and the records that document a child's family connections sit in a case file the youth cannot always easily access. The loss of family and community connection is widely identified as a driver of poor outcomes after youth leave care, including homelessness, unemployment, isolation, and maintaining sibling relationships in particular is associated with greater stability and emotional well-being.

When a youth leaves foster care, whether at 18 years of age or at 21 years of age as an NMD, the county is already required to hand over a set of transition documents and information meant to give the young person the tools to function as an adult: identification, a birth certificate, a health-coverage card, a financial-aid verification letter, and a summary of the youth's family and placement history. That last requirement recognizes that a young person leaving care is entitled to know their own story. In practice, however, the history provided is often general, and it may not contain the practical detail a young adult would actually need to find a parent or sibling, such as a current address, a phone number, or a way to reach them online.

A co-sponsor, the Children's Law Center of California, argues that the current requirement falls short because it does not specify that the youth receive the last known contact information for the people in their family history, leaving a youth who wants to reconnect after leaving care to rely on memory or to piece the information together alone. *This bill* would define what that history must include.

Review Hearings: Their Purpose and in Practice. The dependency system builds in regular review hearings so that youth in care are ensured that a court is periodically examining whether the case is moving toward a permanent, stable home and whether the county is meeting its obligations. For older youth approaching adulthood, there are additional requirements. At 16 years of age the county must confirm certain documents and services have been provided, and at the last hearing before the youth turns 18 years of age, the checklist expands. For youth who remain in extended foster care as NMDs, the reviews continue until the court ends its jurisdiction. The hearing is the point at which a judge can see, on the record, whether a young person is actually leaving care with identification, health coverage, a housing plan, and the other building blocks of independence.

The county is required to submit a report verifying that the specified information, documents, and services have been provided. Because the county satisfies the requirement by submitting a report stating that documents and services have been provided, the hearing can turn to checking a box, rather than providing all of the relevant information a youth might need. Items that are easy to document such as a card, a letter, a form, are captured more reliably than ways to maintain relationships or secure housing. A county can satisfy this verification requirement with a general summary, and nothing in current practice guarantees the summary contains usable contact information. *This bill* clarifies what the history must include.

According to the Author

"Former foster youth often leave care without the information needed to reconnect with their parents, siblings, or extended family, despite the important role these relationships can play in providing stability, support, and a sense of identity. This bill ensures youth have access to known family contact information before exiting foster care, empowering them to make informed choices about maintaining or rebuilding family connections. Providing this information helps address a gap in current law and supports better long-term outcomes for youth transitioning to adulthood."

Arguments in Support

Co-sponsor, Children's Advocacy Institute writes, "California law requires counties to provide youth aging out of foster care with essential information, including identification, proof of citizenship, and guidance on housing and employment. However, even when counties possess contact information for birth parents or extended family, there is no requirement to offer this information to traumatized foster youth who are about to be forced to fend entirely for themselves at either 18 or 21 years of age. Nor are foster youth entitled to such information even if the youth requests it. All of the information in a case file – contact information of relatives included – is available to a former foster youth if they have the money to hire a lawyer to file a legal petition pursuant to Welfare and Institutions Code (WIC) section 827. Overwhelmingly, they do not.

"[This bill] simply requires foster care case workers to offer to foster children being forced to live on their own the option of being provided the last known contact information for parents and siblings and other family members in their case file. Under the bill, this is just an offer – the foster youth is free to decline. The data show this small offer of information already in the possession of case workers could make a life-long difference in the lives of our former foster youth."

Arguments in Opposition

None on file.

FISCAL COMMENTS

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

- 1) The California Department of Social Services (CDSS) estimates ongoing General Fund administrative costs of \$350,000 annually to county welfare agencies for case workers to provide the specified information in reports for every hearing involving a foster youth 16 or 17 years of age and NMDs over 18 years of age.

Although these are state-mandated costs, they are not reimbursable, but instead must be funded by the state pursuant to Proposition 30, which requires legislation enacted after September 30, 2012, that has an overall effect of increasing the costs already borne by a local agency for programs or levels of service mandated by realignment (including child welfare services and foster care) to apply to local agencies only to the extent the state provides annual funding for the cost increase.

- 2) CDSS anticipates minor and absorbable costs for state administration

VOTES**SENATE FLOOR: 34-0-6**

YES: Allen, Archuleta, Arreguín, Ashby, Becker, Blakespear, Cabaldon, Caballero, Choi, Cortese, Dahle, Durazo, Gonzalez, Grayson, Hurtado, Jones, Laird, Limón, McGuire, McNERney, Menjivar, Niello, Ochoa Bogh, Pérez, Richardson, Seyarto, Smallwood-Cuevas, Stern, Strickland, Umberg, Valladares, Wahab, Weber Pierson, Wiener

ABS, ABST OR NV: Alvarado-Gil, Cervantes, Grove, Padilla, Reyes, Rubio

ASM HUMAN SERVICES: 7-0-0

YES: Lee, Tangipa, Calderon, Elhawary, Jackson, Celeste Rodriguez, Sanchez

ASM APPROPRIATIONS: 15-0-0

YES: Wicks, Hoover, Arambula, Calderon, Caloza, Dixon, Fong, Mark González, Krell, Pacheco, Pellerin, Sharp-Collins, Solache, Ta, Tangipa

UPDATED

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