
SENATE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES

Senator Becker, Chair
2025 - 2026 Regular

Bill No: SB 534
Author: Padilla
Version: August 18, 2026
Urgency: No
Consultant: Heather Hopkins

Hearing Date: August 27, 2026
Fiscal: Yes

Subject: Dependent children: information related to family

SUMMARY

This bill requires a county welfare department to provide a minor or nonminor dependent (NMD), at the minor or NMD's final review hearing or prior to the court terminating jurisdiction, the last known whereabouts of the youth's parents and siblings and their last known contact information, unless the youth declines the information.

ABSTRACT

Existing Law:

- 1) Establishes the juvenile dependency system and authorizes the juvenile court to adjudge a child a dependent of the court and to remove a child from parental custody when necessary for the child's safety. (*Welfare and Institutions Code [WIC] 300 et seq.*)
- 2) Requires the social worker, if the child is removed, to conduct, within 30 days, an investigation in order to identify and locate all grandparents, parents of a sibling of the child, adult siblings, other adult relatives of the child, including any other adult relatives suggested by the parents, and, if it is known or there is reason to know the child is an Indian child, any extended family members. Requires the social worker to provide to all adult relatives who are located, except when that relative's history of family or domestic violence makes notification inappropriate, within 30 days of removal of the child, written notification and shall also, whenever appropriate, provide oral notification, in person or by telephone, of specified information related to their removal. (*WIC 309(e)*)
- 3) Requires periodic status review hearings for dependent children no less frequently than every six months, and provides for review hearings for NMDs. (*WIC 366.31, 366.3*)
- 4) Permits an NMD to remain in extended foster care and receive support up to 21 years of age. (*WIC 11400, 11403*)
- 5) Requires the county, at the first review hearing after a dependent child attains 16 years of age, to verify that specified documents and services have been provided, including a

Social Security card, a copy of the birth certificate, a driver's license or identification card, and assistance with employment and education. (*WIC 391(a)*)

- 6) Requires the California Department of Social Services (CDSS), at the last review hearing before a dependent child attains 18 years of age and at each review hearing thereafter, to verify that specified documents have been provided to the minor or nonminor, including a Social Security card, a certified copy of the birth certificate, a Medi-Cal Benefits Identification Card, and a letter verifying the youth's foster care status for financial aid purposes. (*WIC 391(b)*)
- 7) Requires CDSS to provide the whereabouts of any siblings under the jurisdiction of the juvenile court, unless the court determines that sibling contact would jeopardize the safety or welfare of either sibling. (*WIC 391(c)(8)*)
- 8) Prohibits the court from terminating dependency jurisdiction over a nonminor until a hearing is held and CDSS verifies that required information, documents, and services have been provided, including written information concerning the NMD's case, family, and placement history. (*WIC 391(h)*)
- 9) Permits a nonminor to petition the court to resume dependency jurisdiction before attaining 21 years of age. (*WIC 388(e) and 391(g)*)
- 10) Governs access to, and the confidentiality of, juvenile case files. (*WIC 827*)

This Bill:

- 1) Requires a county welfare department, when it provides a foster youth their family and placement history, at the final review hearing before the youth turns 18 years of age, and at the youth's subsequent review hearings as a nonminor dependent (NMD), to include 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) Requires the family information described above to be provided to an NMD as part of the case information furnished before the court ends dependency jurisdiction.
- 3) Allows the youth the option to decline this information.

FISCAL IMPACT

According to the Assembly Appropriations Committee Analysis:

- 1) 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.

BACKGROUND AND DISCUSSION

Purpose of the Bill:

According to the author, “Former 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.”

Child Welfare Services System (CWS)

California’s child welfare services system is an essential component of the state’s safety net. Social workers in each county receive reports of abuse or neglect and investigate and resolve those reports. When an allegation 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 2025, the state’s child welfare agencies received 398,861 reports of abuse or neglect. Of these, 45,856 reports contained substantiated allegations, and 17,886 children were removed from their homes and placed into foster care via the child welfare services 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.

Exiting the Foster Care System

Youth in the foster care system will age out at 18. If they participate in extended foster care, they can stay in the system until they turn 21. Under existing law, youth exiting foster care are provided with a variety of essential information including proof of citizenship, identification, and guidance on housing and employment. No information is given on contact information for their birth parents or extended family. The information in a youth's case file – the file the court has with documentation and information about the entirety of the dependency case from removal until termination of parental rights is confidential – is unavailable to the youth without a court order. This process requires hiring a lawyer or navigating the judicial system alone – an onerous task for an 18-21 year old navigating adulthood. Studies have shown that a majority of these youth seek out their birth parents or extended family after leaving foster care¹. This bill seeks to bridge that gap by providing a youth exiting foster care with contact information for their birth parents and extended family.

Related/Prior Legislation:

SB 384 (Cortese), Chapter 811, Statutes of 2022, revised the family-finding duties of county social workers and probation officers, strengthening the requirement to identify, locate, and engage a child's relatives after the child is removed.

COMMENTS

Youth exiting the foster care system face very different challenges than non-system involved youth. Former foster youth experience higher levels of homelessness, lower graduation rates, challenges with employment and money management. Former foster youth can also experience isolation without the support of their social worker or the system itself. By providing these youth with information on how to contact their biological parents and extended family, they have another avenue to create connection and community and build a support system.

PRIOR VOTES

Assembly Floor:	78 - 0
Assembly Appropriations Committee:	15 - 0

¹ <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC12380043/pdf/nihms-2051451.pdf>

Assembly Human Services Committee:

7 - 0

POSITIONS

Support:

Children's Advocacy Institute (Sponsor)

Children's Law Center of California (Co-Sponsor)

Oppose:

None received

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