

Date of Hearing: April 9, 2024

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES

Alex Lee, Chair

AB 2941 (Grayson) – As Amended March 20, 2024

SUBJECT: Parents and youth: helpline and online support

SUMMARY: Requires the California Department of Social Services (CDSS), subject to an appropriation, to contract with a nonprofit organization to operate and maintain the California Parent and Youth Helpline (Helpline). Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Requires CDSS, subject to an appropriation, to contract with a nonprofit organization to operate and maintain both of the following:
 - a) The Helpline to provide emotional support through calls, live chats, and texts seven days a week; and,
 - b) Weekly online evidence-based support groups for parents, children, and youth to strengthen their families.
- 2) Requires the nonprofit organization to have all of the following qualifications:
 - a) Formally recognized as a culturally responsive program by the California Evidence-Based Clearinghouse for Child Welfare in at least five program areas with the highest relevance to child welfare, including, but not limited to:
 - (i) Parent Partner Programs for Families Involved in the Child Welfare System;
 - (ii) Parent Training Programs that Address Behavior Problems in Children and Adolescents;
 - (iii) Parent Training Programs that Address Child Abuse and Neglect;
 - (iv) Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (Primary) Programs;
 - (v) Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (Secondary) Programs; and,
 - (vi) Interventions for Abusive Behavior.
 - b) Formally recognized as a culturally responsive program by the Title IV-E Prevention Services Clearinghouse.
- 3) Requires, in executing this grant, the responsibilities of the nonprofit organization to include, but are not limited to, all of the following, subject to available funds:
 - a) Providing evidence- and strengths-based prevention and intervention services on the Helpline and through weekly online groups for parents, children, and youth for a minimum of five years;

- b) Providing statewide marketing and outreach to parents, children, and youth;
 - c) Distributing parenting, child development, and resiliency program materials;
 - d) Providing technical assistance and building strategic partnerships with county agencies working with child welfare, mental health, public health, health, social services, and education;
 - e) Enhancing parent, child, and family well-being, and mitigating and preventing adverse childhood experiences;
 - f) Providing leadership training throughout the state to maintain the California Parent Leadership Team operated by Parents Anonymous Inc.; and,
 - g) Enabling parents with lived expertise be represented in policy, program, and evaluation discussions on child welfare, mental health, and prevention services to achieve positive outcomes for all families.
- 4) Makes findings and declarations related to the development of the Helpline in 2020, a free helpline for parents, children, and youth up to 25 years of age needing support.

EXISTING LAW:

State law:

- 1) States legislative intent to exercise the option afforded to states under the Family First Prevention Services Act of 2018 (FFPSA) that provides for a candidate for foster care or a pregnant or parenting foster youth, and their parents or kin caregivers, and that prevention services will be implemented in coordination with the existing continuum of services to improve the safety and well-being of children by strengthening and supporting families so that children can remain safely in their homes. Further states intent that the FFPSA prevention services will improve outcomes for children and families, reduce entries into foster care, and reduce disproportionate entries into foster care of children and youth of color, Native American and Alaskan Native children and youth, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and/or questioning, and other non-cishet gender identities and sexualities children and youth. (Welfare and Institutions Code [WIC] § 16585)
- 2) Establishes that a child may be considered at imminent risk of foster care when the county or tribal caseworker determines, based upon an assessment, that prevention services are necessary to mitigate the child's risk of entry or re-entry into foster care, and the child meets the criteria for imminent risk of foster care established in the State Plan for Title IV-E prevention services and programs and approved by the United States Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families (ACF). (WIC § 16586)
- 3) Authorizes a county to elect to provide prevention services by providing a written plan to CDSS, in accordance with their instructions. Requires counties to consult with other relevant county agencies that serve families and children, Indian tribes, local community representatives, caseworkers, and individuals and families with lived experience with the child welfare system in the development and ongoing implementation of the plan. (WIC § 16587)

- 4) Prohibits a county child welfare agency or county probation department from claiming Title IV-E federal financial participation for prevention services unless CDSS has obtained all necessary federal approvals. (WIC § 16588)
- 5) Requires CDSS to have oversight of the FFPSA program and to consult with the California Department of Health Care Services on any letters or instructions for FFPSA programs that intersect with services under the Medi-Cal program. (WIC § 16589)

Federal law:

- 6) Establishes FFPSA. (Public Law 115-123, 42 United States Code § 674(a)(6))

FISCAL EFFECT: Unknown, this bill has not been analyzed by a fiscal committee.

COMMENTS:

Background: *Family First Prevention Services Act.* FFPSA authorized new optional federal Title IV-E funding for time-limited prevention services for mental health, substance use disorders, and in-home parent skill-based programs for children or youth who are candidates for foster care, pregnant or parenting youth in foster care, and the parents or kin caregivers of those children and youth.

Under FFPSA, CDSS is required to create and operate equitable prevention services that support parents, children, and youth to prevent child welfare involvement and address parenting, mental health, and safety issues which are fulfilled by the Helpline and Weekly Evidence-Based Support Groups. Preventive services are under the purview of CDSS which oversees the federal \$232 million in block grants for counties to use to prevent out-of-home care and to provide help to parents, children, and youth in need.

California Parent and Youth Helpline. The Helpline was established in 2020 through the Budget Act, during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Helpline and Evidence-Based Weekly Free Parents Anonymous Groups were launched statewide to respond to the growing demand for support for families navigating the complexities of the pandemic and those who experienced harm to their emotional health.

The Helpline offers free trauma-informed emotional support to prevent and address any mental health, peer, behavioral, child abuse and neglect, and other family concerns for California parents, children, and youth up to 25 years of age.

The Helpline has staff trained in trauma-informed care, as required in existing law, who are trained in de-escalation techniques that allow for mitigating any concern for harm or safety within families and reporting any suspected harm. All Helpline counselors have a Master's degree in social work or psychology, are a registered intern and working toward licensure with clinical supervision daily to handle any crisis call including suicidal ideation and child abuse. They each receive 80 hours of initial training, two hours a week of clinical supervision, and 50 hours of advanced training per year.

CDSS currently contracts with Parents Anonymous, a nonprofit organization that is listed in the Federal Title IV-E Prevention Clearinghouse, which was established by ACF. The purpose of the Clearinghouse is to conduct an objective and transparent review of research on programs and services intended to provide enhanced support to children and families and prevent foster care

placements. The Helpline qualifies as a prevention service and constitutes a mental health service as individuals calling into the helpline are often in crisis, and the Helpline implements mental health interventions. To ensure continuity of services, The Helpline ensures that counties have this service available within their prevention service array under FFPSA.

Family Urgent Response System (FURS) is a coordinated statewide system that provides phone-based responses and in-home, in-person mobile responses during situations of instability, to preserve the relationship and placement of the caregiver and youth. The hotline is staffed with operators trained in conflict resolution and de-escalation techniques to stabilize the living situation, mitigate the distress of the caregiver or youth, and connect the caregiver and youth to the array of local services suited to their needs.

FURS was established through SB 80 (Committee on Budget and Fiscal Review), Chapter 27, Statutes of 2019. CDSS was required to select a contractor to operate the hotline to respond to calls, and after the RFP went out, the Sacramento Children's Home was awarded the FURS Statewide Hotline contract. The hotline was implemented on March 1, 2021, and counties implemented their mobile response teams in July 2021. The FURS hotline provides immediate support to current and former foster youth throughout California via phone calls, text, live chat, and email 24-hours a day, seven days a week (including holidays).

FURS receives around 5,000 requests for help annually from current and former foster youth and their caregivers. As of October 1, 2023, there are 45,044 youth in foster care.

FURS specializes in the unique needs of foster youth and their caregivers and is staffed by operators who provide trauma-informed care and in-person visits if warranted as an alternative to involving law enforcement when there is instability.

It is important to note this bill does not necessarily replace the function of FURS. As FURS provides immediate, individualized, and in-person, trauma-informed service and support to foster youth and their caregivers. The Helpline described in this bill is broader and does not exclusively serve foster youth and their families using staff trained on the unique needs of foster youth and their families, but instead focuses on keeping families and youth stable as part of a preventive measure, which is also important to keep families from entering the system.

This bill would require CDSS to contract with a nonprofit organization to operate and maintain the Helpline and the weekly online evidence-based support groups for parents, children, and youth to strengthen their families.

Author's Statement: According to the Author, "With the rise of complex mental health issues of children and youth impacting their well-being and the need to support their parents and caregivers, the California Parent and Youth Helpline and Free Weekly Evidence-Based Support Groups provides effective trauma-informed culturally response vital lifesaving services benefiting nearly 20 million diverse California Parents, Children and Youth up to 25. [This bill] will enhance this vital tool, and ensure that it can continue serving California families."

Equity Implications: This bill addresses inequities by ensuring access to free helpline services and weekly support groups to all vulnerable communities of color, gender orientation, class, geography, language, religion, and culture. This Helpline is an equity-focused prevention effort regarding child abuse and neglect. Complex psychological, parenting, behavioral, and family problems are addressed and resources are offered where needed. With shortages of mental health

services and 15% of California teens reporting at least one major depressive episode in the last year, this Helpline can assist through calls, text, and live chat 24 hours a day 7 days a week in 240 languages and can remove stigma and barriers to a culturally responsive service that people trust and rely on which is a lifeline to all who reach out. The Helpline provides an additional essential resource for hard-to-reach communities and rural communities that are attempting to establish a community pathway within their county prevention plan but do not have the local services to do so.

RELATED AND PRIOR LEGISLATION:

AB 157 (Committee on Budget and Fiscal Review), Chapter 50, Statutes of 2022, implemented FFPSA.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:**Support**

Parents Anonymous, Inc. (Sponsor)
American Academy of Pediatrics, California

Opposition

None on file.

Analysis Prepared by: Jessica Langtry / HUM. S. / (916) 319-2089