

Date of Hearing: March 25, 2025

**ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES**

Alex Lee, Chair

AB 898 (Bryan) – As Introduced February 19, 2025

**SUBJECT:** The Family Urgent Response System

**SUMMARY:** Authorizes county-based mobile response systems to utilize staff based on local needs and expands their usage to include those receiving family preservation or voluntary or court-ordered family maintenance services. Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Authorizes a county-based mobile response system that is not otherwise responding to calls placed through the statewide hotline to utilize mobile response team staff based on local needs, including, but not limited to, any of the following:
  - a) Engaging in in-person education and outreach;
  - b) Responding to local child, youth, or caregiver requests for support;
  - c) Providing ongoing support to a child, youth, or caregiver who has received mobile response services; and,
  - d) Responding to calls from children and families during a hotline investigation or who are receiving family preservation or voluntary or court-ordered family maintenance services.
- 2) Requires the county-based mobile response system to prioritize calls placed through the statewide hotline for urgent responses and to maintain sufficient staffing to ensure county-based mobile response teams maintain compliance with all requirements set forth in 9) below.
- 3) Clarifies that the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) is required to establish a statewide hotline as the primary entry point for the Family Urgent Response System (FURS), which must be available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, to respond to calls from a caregiver or current or former foster youth during moments of instability.
- 4) Requires the coordinated plan submitted to CDSS that describes how the county-based mobile response system will meet the requirements described in 9) below, to be revisited on a biennial basis.

**EXISTING LAW:**

- 1) Requires CDSS to establish a statewide hotline as the entry point for FURS, to be available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, to respond to calls from a caregiver or current or former foster child or youth during moments of instability. (Welfare and Institutions Code [WIC] § 16527(a))
- 2) Requires both of the following to be available through this hotline:

- a) Hotline workers who are trained in techniques for de-escalation and conflict resolution telephone response specifically for children or youth impacted by trauma; and,
  - b) Referrals to a county-based mobile response system for further support and in-person response. (WIC § 16527(a)(1))
- 3) Requires referrals to occur as follows:
- a) A warm handoff whereby the hotline worker establishes a direct and live connection through a three-way call that includes the caregiver, child or youth, and county contact. Allows the caregiver, child, or youth to decline the three-way contact with the county contact if they feel their situation has been resolved at the time of the call;
  - b) If direct communication cannot be established, a referral directly to the community- or county-based service and a follow-up call to ensure that a connection to the caregiver, child, or youth occurs; and,
  - c) Requires the hotline worker to contact the caregiver and the child or youth within 24 hours after the initial call to offer additional support, if needed. (WIC § 16527(a)(2))
- 4) Requires the statewide hotline to maintain contact information for all county-based mobile response systems, based on information provided by counties, for referrals to local services, including, but not limited to, county-based mobile response and stabilization teams. (WIC § 16527(b))
- 5) Requires CDSS to ensure that de-identified, aggregated data are collected regarding individuals served through the statewide hotline and county-based mobile response systems and to publish an annual report on their website regarding the number of caregivers served and the disposition of each call, among other outcomes. (WIC § 16527(c))
- 6) Requires CDSS, in consultation with stakeholders, including current and former foster youth and caregivers, to do all of the following:
- a) Develop methods and materials for informing all caregivers and current or former foster children or youth about the statewide hotline, including a dissemination plan for those materials;
  - b) Establish protocols for triage and response;
  - c) Establish minimum education and training requirements for hotline workers; and,
  - d) Consider expanding the statewide hotline to include communication through electronic means, including text messaging or email. (WIC § 16527(e))
- 7) Requires county child welfare, probation, and behavioral health agencies, in each county or region of counties, to establish a joint county-based mobile response system that includes a mobile response and stabilization team for the purpose of providing supportive services to address situations of instability, preserve the relationship of the caregiver and the child or youth, develop healthy conflict resolution and relationship skills, promote healing as a family, and stabilize the situation. (WIC § 16529(a))

- 8) Requires, in each county or region of counties, the county child welfare, probation, and behavioral health agencies, in consultation with other relevant county agencies, tribal representatives, caregivers, and current or former foster children or youth, to submit a single, coordinated plan to CDSS that describes how the county-based mobile response system will meet the requirements described in 9) below. (WIC § 16529(b))
- 9) Requires a county-based mobile response system to include all of the following:
  - a) Phone response at the county level that facilitates entry of the caregivers and current or former foster youth into mobile response services;
  - b) A process for determining when a mobile response and stabilization team will be sent, or when other services will be used, based on the urgent and critical needs of the caregiver, child, or youth;
  - c) A mobile response and stabilization team available 24 hours a day, seven days a week;
  - d) Ability to provide immediate, in-person, face-to-face response preferably within one hour, but not to exceed three hours in extenuating circumstances for urgent needs, or same-day response within 24 hours for non-urgent situations;
  - e) Utilization of individuals with specialized training in trauma of children or youth and the foster care system on the mobile response and stabilization team. Efforts should be made to include peer partners and those with lived experience in the response team, whenever possible;
  - f) Provision of in-home de-escalation, stabilization, and support services and supports, and,
  - g) A process for communicating with the county of jurisdiction and the county behavioral health agency regarding the service needs of the youth and caregiver provided that the youth is currently under the jurisdiction of either the county child welfare or the probation system. (WIC § 16529(c))

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

**COMMENTS:**

**Background:** *Child Welfare Services (CWS)*. The purpose of California's CWS system is to protect children from abuse and neglect and provide for their health and safety. When children are identified as being at risk of abuse, neglect, or abandonment, county juvenile courts hold legal jurisdiction; these children are served by the CWS system through the appointment of a social worker. Through this system, there are multiple opportunities for the custody of the child, or their placement outside of the home, to be evaluated, reviewed, and determined by the judicial system, in consultation with the child's social worker, to help provide the best possible services to the child. The CWS system seeks to help children removed from their homes reunify with their parents or guardians, whenever appropriate. However, the court may determine that an alternate permanent placement is more fitting and give preference to relatives or nonrelative extended family members. As of October 2024, there are 40,165 youth between birth and 20 years of age placed in California's CWS system.

Children placed in the CWS system are removed from their parents' custody because they have suffered abuse or neglect, often at a young age. Research on brain development demonstrates that infancy and early childhood are critical periods in a child's development when it comes to forming attachments and laying the foundation for future skills such as empathy, trust, and problem solving. In 2012, a publication by the American Psychological Association found that nearly half of foster youth were determined to have clinically significant emotional or behavioral health problems, and children under seven years of age who enter foster care show increased rates of developmental problems. Additionally, foster youth are at a greater risk of struggling in school, facing difficulties in finding employment, and experiencing substance use issues.

*FURS.* In 2018, the Legislature introduced legislation to establish the FURS program; however, Governor Brown vetoed the bill out of concern for the substantial financial cost of the program, stating it would be better implemented through the budget process.

As a result, the FURS program was adopted through the 2019 budget (SB 80 [Committee on Budget and Fiscal Review] Chapter 27, Statutes of 2019). It was designed to build on the Continuum of Care Reform and system-of-care developments in the foster care system to increase foster youth and caregiver access to mental health services and provide counseling and conflict resolution in moments of crisis. The statewide hotline became available for youth and caregivers on March 1, 2021. The legislation authorized CDSS to contract with the Sacramento Children's Home to operate the statewide hotline, and as of July 1, 2021, mobile response teams were fully implemented across all counties.

The passage of FURS required CDSS and the counties to establish a coordinated statewide, regional, and county-level response system for current and former foster children, youth, and nonminor dependents (NMDs) and their caregivers. This response system was designed to provide a collaborative and timely state-level, 24/7 hotline for immediate response and a county-level, in-home, in-person mobile response during situations of crisis or instability. The ultimate goal is to preserve the relationship between the caregiver and the child or youth.

FURS was designed to provide children or youth currently or formerly in foster care, as well as their caregivers, with immediate, trauma-informed support via the 24/7 statewide hotline whenever issues or conflicts arise. When calling the hotline, youth or caregivers are connected to trained counselors who specialize in conflict resolution and de-escalation. These counselors help address conflicts in real time, often resolving issues without requiring further intervention.

By providing immediate support, FURS provides a trauma-informed alternative to calling 911 or law enforcement, which previously was often the only option. If additional support is needed, the hotline can connect youth or caregivers to county mobile response and stabilization teams. These teams provide in-home services focused on de-escalation, stabilization, conflict resolution, and ongoing support from a trauma-informed perspective. Both the hotline and the mobile response teams help link youth and caregivers to local services for continued assistance, if needed, ensuring access to a comprehensive network of support.

The initial crisis response and connection to ongoing support are intended to assist with long-term conflict management and resolution skills. These services aim to stabilize living situations, mitigate distress for children or youth, and promote a healthy, healing environment for children, youth, NMDs, and families. Ideally, these interventions prevent disruptive placement changes or

the need for more restrictive interventions, such as law enforcement involvement, hospitalizations, or congregate care placement referrals.

*Placement Stability Rates.* Several factors contribute to California’s placement stability rates for foster youth in California, including limited access to community-based, trauma-informed support during crises. Additionally, many caregivers call the police for assistance during times of crisis because they lack alternative immediate support options. FURS aims to remediate these challenges by offering current and former foster youth and their caregivers with immediate, trauma-informed services that work to prevent placement disruptions, reduce law enforcement involvement, and minimize placements in out-of-home facilities.

Data show that in Los Angeles County, which has the largest number of FURS support requests, 87% of in-person mobile responses have successfully stabilized placements. This pattern continues statewide, where the total number of placement changes in California has decreased by 16% since the launch of FURS. Furthermore, the percentage of youth who have been in foster care for a year and moved three or more times is now at an all-time low of 26.7%—representing a 20% decrease since FURS was implemented.

*Is FURS Underutilized?* According to the FURS 2023 Legislative Report, “In the third year of the FURS program, utilization of the hotline and mobile response steadily increased, as observed in month-to-month comparisons. There was a total of 4,987 calls made to the hotline in the period of January 1, 2023, to December 31, 2023, with 1,090 of those calls resulting in an in-person mobile response.” Advocates assert that requiring a call to the state hotline to dispatch county mobile response teams, along with restricting services to only current and former foster youth, has led to FURS being underutilized.

*This bill* aims to expand access to FURS, increase its use among families involved in the CWS, and further improve placement stability through the following changes:

- *Streamlining Mobile Response Access:* Under current law, counties must first direct calls through the FURS state hotline before dispatching mobile response teams. *This bill* will explicitly authorize counties to deploy these teams based on local needs, eliminating the state-level call requirement.
- *Expanding Eligibility:* FURS services are currently limited to current and former foster youth and their families. *This bill* will extend eligibility to families receiving family preservation services and those participating in voluntary or court-ordered family maintenance services.
- *Ensure Ongoing Program Effectiveness:* *This bill* will mandate a biennial, county-wide, cross-system review of local FURS implementation to ensure that services remain continuously available to system-impacted families.

**Author’s Statement:** According to the Author, “[This bill] is a bill designed to expand access to the Family Urgent Response System (FURS), which provides timely, state-level phone-based responses and county-level in-home, in-person mobile responses during periods of instability. This bill will make county-level mobile-response teams directly accessible to community members, expand eligibility to families using family preservation services to prevent foster care entries, and promote regular reviews to keep these services updated and effective. Through these efforts, [this bill] will ensure that FURS remains readily available for families in need, ultimately

supporting greater retention in caregiver placements for foster youth and at-risk non-foster youth impacted by the child welfare system.”

**Equity Implications:** The provisions of *this bill* seek to expand access to FURS by broadening the population it serves and authorizing county mobile response teams to be dispatched without first requiring a call to the state hotline.

Among youth callers whose race and or ethnicity was recorded, Black adolescents accounted for the second-highest number of calls (10.8%) after White adolescents, followed by Native American youth. Data show that Black and Native American youth are largely overrepresented in foster care – approximately four times their share of the general youth population in California. Additionally, data on California’s 1999 birth cohort indicates that by 18 years of age, about one in two Black and Native American children experience some level of engagement with the CWS.

Economic disparities also play a critical role in child welfare involvement. California children with public insurance, such as Medi-Cal, experience child welfare intervention at more than twice the rate of those with private insurance. Given this strong correlation between income and CWS involvement, *this bill* seeks to expand access to FURS services to help mitigate the challenges of placement disruptions, particularly for low-income youth and youth of color who are disproportionately affected.

#### **RELATED AND PRIOR LEGISLATION:**

*AB 1005 (Arambula) of 2019*, was identical to AB 2043. *AB 1005 was referred to the Assembly Human Services Committee but was not set for hearing.*

*AB 2043 (Arambula) of 2018*, would have required, subject to appropriation, county child welfare, probation, and behavioral health agencies to establish county-based Family Urgent Response Systems for the provision of mobile crisis-response services to current or former foster youth and their caregivers, and, by that same date and subject to appropriation, and would have required CDSS to establish a statewide hotline, to be available 24 hours per day, seven days per week to respond to caregiver or youth calls when a crisis arises. *AB 2043 was vetoed by Governor Brown due to cost.*

#### **REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:**

##### **Support**

Children Now (Co-Sponsor)  
 County Welfare Directors Association of California (Co-Sponsor)  
 All for Kids  
 Alliance for Children's Rights  
 Aspiranet  
 California Alliance of Caregivers  
 California Family Resource Association  
 Child Abuse Prevention Center and Its Affiliates Safe Kids California, Prevent Child Abuse  
 California and The California Family Resource Association  
 Children's Law Center of California  
 Seneca Family of Agencies

**Opposition**

None on file.

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