

Date of Hearing: June 30, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES

Alex Lee, Chair

SB 534 (Padilla) – As Amended April 23, 2026

SENATE VOTE: 34-0

SUBJECT: Dependent children: information related to family

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 minor did not decline the information. Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Requires counties, when it provides a foster youth's family and placement history 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 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 that same family information to be provided to an NMD as part of the case information furnished before the court ends dependency jurisdiction.
- 3) Permits the youth to decline this information.
- 4) Clarifies that the review-hearing reporting requirements continue at the regularly scheduled review hearings held for NMDs.

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); WIC § 391(g))
- 10) Governs access to, and the confidentiality of, juvenile case files. (WIC § 827)

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

COMMENTS:

Background: *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 freely 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 review continues 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 verification requirement is only as strong as the report behind it. 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 softer obligations such as maintaining relationships or securing 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.

Author’s Statement: 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.”

Equity Implications: The provisions of *this bill* clarify that the family and placement history a foster youth receives includes the detail needed to locate family. It requires that the history provided at the last review hearing before the youth attains 18 years of age, and at later nonminor review hearings, include the last known whereabouts of the youth’s parents and siblings and their last known contact information, allowing the youth to decline some or all of the information, preserving the young person’s control over whether to receive it. Most young people reach adulthood already knowing how to find their parents and siblings. A youth who has spent years in foster care, separated from relatives by the very system meant to protect them, often does not have it, even though the information sits in their own case file. By ensuring that a young person leaves care with the contact details their peers never had to think about, *this bill* gives foster youth the same starting point for sustaining family relationships in adulthood that young people outside the system take for granted.

Arguments in Support: According to co-sponsor, Children’s Advocacy Institute, “[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.

RELATED AND PRIOR LEGISLATION:

AB 896 (Elhawary), Chapter 564, Statutes of 2025, addressed foster care placement transition planning and revised the Foster Youth Bill of Rights, requiring planning to preserve and stabilize a dependent child’s placement and connections when a placement change occurs.

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.

AB 1849 (Gipson), Chapter 609, Statutes of 2016, revised the list of information, documents, and services that must be provided to a nonminor before the court terminates dependency jurisdiction, including a Medi-Cal Benefits Identification Card and continued, uninterrupted Medi-Cal enrollment.

SB 1099 (Steinberg), Chapter 773, Statutes of 2014, expanded sibling-visitation rights for youth in foster care, allowing any party to request a court order for visitation between a foster youth and a sibling who is not in care, requiring the court to revisit any suspension of visitation at each six-month review hearing, and requiring the social worker to document the circumstances of visitation.

AB 12 (Beall), Chapter 559, Statutes of 2010, enacted the California Fostering Connections to Success Act, which created extended foster care for NMDs up to 21 years of age and established the exit-hearing structure under which the county must verify that specified information and documents have been provided before the court terminates.

AB 938 (Committee on Judiciary), Chapter 261, Statutes of 2009, established California’s family-finding requirements, directing the social worker, within 30 days of a child’s removal, to identify, locate, and notify the child’s relatives, while excusing notification of a relative whose history of family or domestic violence makes notification inappropriate.

AB 1412 (Leno), Chapter 640, Statutes of 2005, required social workers to ask all foster youth about the people who are important to them and to take steps to maintain those relationships, and gave youth 12 years of age and older the right to participate in developing their own permanency plans.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

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

Childrens Advocacy Institute (Co-Sponsor)

All of Us or None Orange County

Families Inspiring Reentry & Reunification 4 Everyone (FIR4E)

Justice2Jobs Coalition
Sycamores

Opposition

None on file.

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