

Date of Hearing: April 7, 2021

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES
Lisa Calderon, Chair
AB 1006 (Blanca Rubio) – As Introduced February 18, 2021

SUBJECT: Foster care: social worker turnover workgroup

SUMMARY: Requires the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) to convene a workgroup to examine the negative effects of high turnover of foster family agency (FFA) social workers on foster youth and to identify measures to reduce foster family agency social worker turnover in order to improve permanency outcomes for foster youth. Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Requires CDSS to convene a workgroup with concerned stakeholders, as specified, to examine the negative effects of high turnover of foster family agency social workers on foster children and to identify measures to reduce turnover and improve permanency outcomes for foster youth.
- 2) Provides that the workgroup be composed of, but not be limited to, the following:
 - a) Foster youth or former foster youth,
 - b) Foster care caregiver organizations,
 - c) Child advocacy organizations, and,
 - d) FFA social workers.
- 3) Requires CDSS to submit the workgroup's findings to the Legislature, as specified, including specific recommendations to reduce foster family agency social worker turnover, on or before December 31, 2022. Provides that recommendations made by the workgroup are not binding on any state or local government agency.
- 4) Provides that the requirement to submit the report as described is inoperative on December 31, 2026.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Establishes a state and local system of child welfare services (CWS), including foster care, for children who have been adjudged by the court to be at risk of abuse and neglect or to have been abused or neglected, as specified. (Welfare and Institutions Code Section [WIC] 202)
- 2) States that the purpose of foster care law is to provide maximum safety and protection for children who are currently being physically, sexually, or emotionally abused, neglected, or exploited, and to ensure the safety, protection, and physical and emotional well-being of children who are at risk of harm. (WIC 300.2)
- 3) Provides Legislative intent to preserve and strengthen a child's family ties whenever possible and to reunify a foster youth with their biological family whenever possible, or to provide a permanent placement alternative. (WIC 16000)

- 4) Establishes a state and local system of CWS with the intent to provide a statewide system of services where all children are entitled to be safe and free from abuse and neglect. (WIC 16500)
- 5) States that the purpose of foster care law is to provide maximum safety and protection for children who are currently being physically, sexually, or emotionally abused, neglected, or exploited, and to ensure the safety, protection, and physical and emotional well-being of children who are at risk of harm. (WIC 300.2)
- 6) Requires reports of suspected child abuse or neglect to be made by mandated reporters to certain entities, including any police department or sheriff's department, county probation department, or the county welfare department, as specified. (Penal Code Section [PEN] 11165.9)
- 7) Defines "foster family agency" to mean any public agency or private organization, organized and operated on a nonprofit basis, engaged in any of the following:
 - a) Recruiting, certifying, approving, and training of, and providing professional support to, foster parents and resource families;
 - b) Coordinating with county placing agencies to find homes for foster children in need of care; or,
 - c) Providing services and supports to licensed or certified foster parents, county-approved resource families, and children to the extent authorized by state and federal law. (Health and Safety Code Section [HSC] 1502(a)(4))
- 8) Requires FFAs to have a plan of operation that describes treatment practices, among other requirements. (HSC 1506.1)

FISCAL EFFECT: Unknown

COMMENTS:

Child Welfare Services: Suspicion of child abuse or neglect can be reported to either law enforcement or a county child welfare agency. Often, reports are made by mandated reporters who are legally required to report any suspicion of child abuse or neglect due to their profession. When a mandated reporter submits a report to either law enforcement or the county child welfare agency, a social worker determines whether the allegation is of suspected abuse, neglect, or exploitation. The child's social worker and the court collaborate throughout evaluating and reviewing the circumstances affecting the child's safety and well-being with the ultimate goal of protecting the youth from abuse and neglect. As of October 1, 2020, there were 60,045 youth placed in the state's child welfare system in total.

Continuum of Care Reform (CCR): In recent years, California has enacted legislation, known as CCR, to improve placement and treatment options for youth in foster care. AB 403 (Stone), Chapter 773, Statutes of 2015, sponsored by CDSS, sought to improve outcomes for children and youth served by the CWS system by working to ensure that foster youth have their day-to-day physical, mental, and emotional needs met, that they have the opportunity to grow up in permanent and supportive homes, and have the opportunities necessary to become self-sufficient and successful adults. CCR also sought to reduce the use of congregate care as a frequently used placement option for youth, as data have demonstrated that youth placed in congregate care settings experience poorer

outcomes than youth placed in family settings. Subsequent legislation to further facilitate implementation of CCR efforts include AB 1997 (Stone), Chapter 612, Statutes of 2016, AB 404 (Stone), Chapter 732, Statutes of 2017, AB 1930 (Stone), Chapter 910, Statutes of 2018, AB 819 (Stone), Chapter 777, Statutes of 2019, and AB 2944 (Stone), Chapter 104, Statutes of 2020.

Foster Family Agency: FFAs are utilized by counties to assist with youth in CWS who require intensive care. FFAs provide professional support to foster parents and resource families through training and recruitment. They also provide services and supports to licensed certified foster parents, county-approved resource families, and children. These agencies also provide mental health services to dependent children that require additional support but do not qualify for a Short-Term Residential Therapeutic Program (STRTP). FFA social workers are available to support the foster youth and families 24/7, however the rates offered to these providers combined with other job factors result in a high turnover rate. According to the U.S. Department of Labor, “the cost of employee turnover is one-third of the exiting worker’s annual salary”, leading FFAs to cover employee loss rather than contribute funding back into the foster youth they support.

Coronavirus Pandemic: In March of 2020, Governor Gavin Newsom declared a statewide state of emergency in response to the global COVID-19 pandemic. With over 500,000 deaths resulting from coronavirus across our country, the impact of this virus has touched almost every aspect of everyday life. We have watched as the effects of COVID-19 have added strain on California’s public programs, healthcare system, and the financial security of many. As our state begins the road to recovery, many youth who have been isolated will make their way back to classrooms and communal settings, allowing mandated reports to resume contact and creating an anticipated spike in reports of suspected abuse and neglect.

Need for this bill: This bill would require CDSS to convene a workgroup to explore the negative effects of the high turnover of FFA social workers on foster youth. While these workers provide support for youth that require extensive care, they are one of the lowest-paid professional social workers, which, combined with other factors, leads to high turnover. To increase positive outcomes for foster youth, it is essential to establish stability, including within the social workers that support them. Recommendations from the workgroup established through this bill could reduce workforce turnover and improve foster youth’s permanency outcomes.

According to the author, “It is my honor to continue fighting for FFA Social Workers. The data are already available that reducing turnover improves overall health and achievement outcomes for foster youth. The resiliency of our foster youth in the face of COVID-19 cannot be understated; however, providing for them should not come at a financial burden to those who dedicate their lives to keeping them safe. As we reopen the state, the number of cases of child abuse is expected to rise with access to court mandated reporters and when the natural supports of schools, medical appointments, sports, community and religious organizations and extracurricular activities return. California will need experienced social workers who have been essential employees on the front lines to be prepared.”

RELATED AND PRIOR LEGISLATION:

AB 2086 (Rubio) of 2020, would have required an annual cost of living adjustment for the rate paid to FFA social workers and required CDSS to convene a workgroup to establish a rate structure for these workers. AB 2086 was referred to the Assembly Appropriations Committee but not set for hearing.

AB 819 (Stone) Chapter 777, Statutes of 2019, made provisions to the Continuum of Care, and among other things, extended the sunset until January 1, 2021, on the temporary rate that ensures a child placed in a home-based setting and a child placed in a certified family home or with a resource family approved by a FFA, is eligible for the same basic rate.

SB 80 (Committee on Budget and Fiscal Review) Chapter 27, Statutes of 2019, instituted an increase of 4.15% to the rates paid to FFA social workers with a sunset of December 31, 2021, as specified.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

California Alliance of Child and Family Services (Co-Sponsor)
National Association of Social Workers, California Chapter (Co-Sponsor)
Aldea Children & Family Services
Allies for Every Child
Alternative Family Services
Aspiranet
California Coalition for Youth
Children First Foster Family Agency
Children Now
Children's Bureau of Southern California
Extraordinary Families
Family Builders by Adoption
Florence Crittenton Services of Orange County, INC.
Hathaway-Sycamores
Hillsides
John Burton Advocates for Youth
Kamali'i Foster Family Agency
New Dimensions Foster Family Agency
Promesa Behavioral Health
Stanford Youth Solutions
Transitions Children's Services
Vista Del Mar Child and Family Services
Walden Family Services
Wayfinder Family Services
Youth for Change
One private citizen

Opposition

None on file

Analysis Prepared by: Emmalynn Mathis / HUM. S. / (916) 319-2089