

Date of Hearing: March 26, 2019

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES

Eloise Gómez Reyes, Chair

AB 734 (Maienschein) – As Amended March 18, 2019

SUBJECT: Resource families: supportive services pilot program

SUMMARY: Requires the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) to establish a pilot program in up to five counties in order to provide additional supports and services to resource families through coaching and consult relevant stakeholders and consider stakeholder recommendations regarding certain parameters of the pilot program, and requires participating counties to conduct at least one evaluation regarding the program's impact and effectiveness. Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Requires CDSS to establish and facilitate a pilot program in no more than five counties, including both rural and urban counties, that voluntarily apply and are selected by CDSS, in order to increase placement stability for foster youth and facilitate greater resource family retention, as specified.
- 2) Allows funding for the pilot program to include Mental Health Services Act monies allocated to the Mental Health Services Oversight and Accountability Commission to the extent that the Commission determined that the activities of the pilot program fall within certain purposes described in current law, and the Commission elects to provide funding for those activities.
- 3) Delays implementation of the pilot program until after CDSS has received and reviewed the recommendations of the stakeholder work group established by the provisions of this bill, but stipulates that implementation shall commence no later than January 1, 2021.
- 4) Requires a participating county to meet the following conditions and requirements:
 - a) Have a demonstrated capacity for collaboration and interagency coordination;
 - b) Have a viable plan for ongoing financial support of the program;
 - c) Have strong and viable public or private agencies to operate the program; and,
 - d) Describe how the county will develop and maintain the necessary community supports.
- 5) Requires the program to provide coaching to resource families who volunteer to participate in the program through a trained mentor, social worker, or mental health care provider who has received pilot program coaching training.
- 6) Requires coaches to assist resource families to effectively utilize and implement skills and information covered in preapproval training, as specified, in order to promote a stable and nurturing home environment for youth placed in the resource family home.
- 7) Requires coaches to inform participating resource families of certain available state and county supportive services, as specified.

- 8) Prohibits participation in the pilot program from being a condition of resource family approval or a requirement for a resource family to receive or maintain the placement of a youth.
- 9) Requires the program to provide family support services, as specified, including, but not limited to:
 - a) Assessment and case management;
 - b) Social services referral and intervention aimed at maintaining the family unit, such as housing, homemaker services, respite care, legal services, and daycare;
 - c) Transportation for medical care and educational and recreational activities;
 - d) Information and referral services;
 - e) Individual and group counseling in the area of parent-child relationships and group conflict;
 - f) Counseling and referral services aimed at promoting permanency, including adoption and guardianship;
 - g) Tutoring and mentoring; and,
 - h) Strengths-based, skills-based, trauma-informed coaching.
- 10) Requires a participating county to first seek to employ current social workers who meet the eligibility criteria established by CDSS, as specified, to serve as coaches for the pilot program, and, further, allows a county to hire new social workers who are eligible, if necessary.
- 11) Prohibits a social worker with a current caseload from being eligible to serve as a coach.
- 12) Allows a county that is unable to fill a coach position with a current social worker or new hire to contract with a private individual or entity to fill the position, provided the coach meets all eligibility criteria, as specified.
- 13) Requires CDSS, no later than June 30, 2020, to consult relevant stakeholders, as specified, and consider stakeholder recommendations regarding certain parameters of the pilot program, including, but not limited to, the following:
 - a) Application and selection criteria for participating counties;
 - b) A skills-based, strengths-based, trauma-informed coaching program curriculum, as specified;
 - c) Application and selection criteria for coaches; and,
 - d) Criteria used by counties to evaluate the effectiveness of the program in achieving the overall goals of the pilot program.

- 14) Requires participating counties to conduct at least one evaluation of the program's impact and effectiveness on increasing placement stability for foster youth and retaining resource families, as specified, and to submit this evaluation to CDSS by December 31, 2022.
- 15) Requires CDSS to report the information provided by counties pursuant to provisions of this bill to the Legislature, as specified.
- 16) Repeals the provisions of this bill related to the pilot program as of January 1, 2023.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) 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. (Welfare and Institutions Code [WIC] Section 300.2)
- 2) Declares the intent of the Legislature to, whenever possible, preserve and strengthen a child's family ties and, when a child must be removed from the physical custody of their parents, to give preferential consideration to placement with relatives. States the intent of the Legislature to reaffirm its commitment to children who are in out-of-home placement to live in the least restrictive family setting and as close to the child's family as possible, as specified. Further states the intent of the Legislature that all children live with a committed, permanent, nurturing family and states that services and supports should be tailored to meet the specific needs of the individual child and family being served, as specified. (WIC 16000)
- 3) Establishes the Child Welfare Training Program with the purpose of developing and implementing statewide coordinated training programs designed to meet the needs of foster youth, as specified. (WIC 16206 *et seq.*)
- 4) States the intent of the Legislature that foster parents, and potential foster parents, receive training in order to assist them in being effective caregivers and to enhance the safety and growth of children placed with them. Further states the need to develop a basic curriculum, a program for continuing education, and specialized training for parents caring for children with unique needs. (Health and Safety Code [HSC] Section 1529.1)
- 5) Requires a resource family to demonstrate an understanding of the safety, permanence, and well-being needs of children who have been victims of child abuse and neglect, and the willingness to make use of support resources by the agency, or support structure in place, or both. (WIC 16519.5 (c)(1)(A))
- 6) Requires every licensed foster parent to complete a minimum of 12 hours of preapproval caregiver training, as specified, prior to any foster youth being placed with him or her. Further requires a licensed foster parent to complete at least 8 hours of foster parent training, as specified, annually. (WIC 16519.5 (g)(13) and (14), HSC 1529.2(b))
- 7) Allows a county to provide supportive services to all licensed foster family homes, relatives, and nonrelative extended family members with a child in placement to assist with the resource family transition and to minimize placement disruptions. (WIC 16519.5 (o)(5))

- 8) Establishes the Kinship Support Services Program to provide community-based family support services to relative caregivers and the children placed in their homes by the juvenile court, or who are at risk of dependency or delinquency. (WIC 16605)

FISCAL EFFECT: Unknown

COMMENTS:

Child welfare services: California's Child Welfare Services (CWS) system exists to protect children from abuse and neglect, and in doing so, provides for their health, safety, and overall well-being. When suspicions of abuse or neglect arise, often as a result of a report by a mandated reporter like a doctor or teacher, Child Protective Services is tasked with investigating the report. If the allegation of abuse or neglect is substantiated, it is then determined whether it is in the best interest of the child to remain in their parent's custody or be placed within the CWS system. If a child is suspected to be at risk of neglect, abuse, or abandonment, the juvenile court holds legal jurisdiction, and the CWS system appoints a social worker to ensure that the needs of a youth are met. Through CWS, multiple opportunities arise for the judicial system to evaluate, review, and determine the custody of the child, or determine the best out-of-home placement for youth, which includes foster care or placement with relatives. As of October 2018, there were 59,487 youth between the ages of 0 and 21 placed in California's CWS system.

Continuum of Care Reform: Over the past four years, California has enacted legislation, known as the Continuum of Care Reform (CCR), to improve placement and treatment options for youth in foster care. AB 403 (Stone), Chapter 773, Statutes of 2015, sponsored by the California Department of Social Services (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, and AB 1930 (Stone), Chapter 910, Statutes of 2018.

Resource Family Approval: process and requirements: The Resource Family Approval (RFA) program, authorized by AB 340 (Hancock), Chapter 464, Statutes of 2007, began as a pilot program in five counties, including Santa Barbara, San Francisco, San Luis Obispo, Kings, and Santa Clara from November 2013 to August 2014. Between January and July of 2016, an additional 9 counties volunteered to implement RFA, and on January 1, 2017, SB 1013 (Senate Committee on Budget) Chapter 35, Statutes of 2012, implemented RFA statewide.

The RFA process is a unified, family-friendly, and child-centered process that combines elements of foster parent licensing, relative approval, and adoption/guardianship approval processes. The RFA process includes a psychosocial assessment, home environment check, and training for all resource families, including relatives, in order to ensure that caregivers are equipped to best meet the needs of youth in foster care. RFA is also a route to direct permanency for caregivers who wish to adopt or be guardians of youth in care, as the RFA process includes elements required by both the adoption and guardianship processes.

Prior to approval as a resource family, applicants must complete 12 hours of pre-approval caregiver training to ensure caregivers have the necessary knowledge and skills to provide adequate care to foster youth. The training often includes: an overview of the CWS and probation systems; the effects of trauma, including grief, loss, and abuse and neglect, on a child's development and behavior; health issues in foster care; the rights of a child in foster care; and the cultural needs of children, among others. Current law also requires approved resource families to complete a minimum of eight hours of caregiver training annually to ensure resource families are equipped on an ongoing basis to provide for the needs of youth in their care. Annual caregiver training includes topics such as: health issues in foster care; promoting normal childhood experiences; permanence; well-being; and the cultural and education needs of youth, among other topics. The provisions of this bill would include coaching among the supports offered to resource families to ensure resource families provide the best care possible to youth in their care.

Similar programs and models: The provisions of this bill are based on several similar programs and models, including:

Kinship Support Services Program (KSSP): The Kinship Support Services Program (KSSP) provides non-financial support services to relative caregivers who have dependents of the juvenile court and not court-dependent youth placed in their homes. KSSP also provides post-permanency supports to caregivers in order to strengthen a family's ability to provide ongoing support and stability for youth. The KSSP model can include such supports as case management, health management, support groups, counseling services, respite care, referrals, and advocacy, among others. The provisions of this bill mirror several core components of the KSSP, including the requirement that participating counties: have viable financial support, have strong and viable public or private agencies to operate the pilot program, and describe how the county will develop and maintain the necessary community supports.

Northern California Training Academy: Created as a partnership between the University of California, Davis and state government, the Northern California Training Academy enables social workers and child welfare practitioners in rural communities to develop new skills through a coaching model. The Academy offers training to child welfare workers that ranges from mandatory core education to specialized topics, and allows for both online and in-person training.

Need for this bill: The provisions of this bill seek to provide additional supports and resources for caregivers entrusted with the care of foster youth. Recent reform efforts through CCR have decreased the state's reliance on congregate care settings for foster youth and, as a result, have increased the need for quality resource families who are equipped to provide for the needs of youth in care. Research and studies have demonstrated that youth placed in foster care have some of the highest health, mental health, and educational needs as a result of abuse, neglect, and resulting trauma. The provisions of this bill seek to provide additional support to caregivers through a pilot program that provides transportation for medical care and educational and recreational activities, tutoring and mentoring, and coaching, among other supports.

According to the author, "This bill provides much needed supports to our most valuable resource families. The success of CCR and the child welfare system rests on the shoulders of these families. The supports provided in this bill, including coaching, respite, and transportation

services, will help families meet the needs of the children in these family homes, leading to vastly improved placement stability and the retention of resource families.”

PRIOR LEGISLATION:

AB 1784 (Maienschein) of 2018 was substantially similar to this bill and would have required CDSS to establish a pilot program to support resource families through coaching, and, further, would have required CDSS to inform resource families of all available state and county resources. AB 1784 was held on the Senate Appropriations Committee suspense file.

AB 1930 (Stone), Chapter 910, Statutes of 2018, furthered CCR efforts made by AB 403, AB 1997, and AB 404.

AB 404 (Stone), Chapter 732, Statutes of 2017, furthered CCR efforts made by AB 403 and AB 1997.

AB 1006 (Maienschein), Chapter 714, Statutes of 2017, required the provision of information about mental health treatment information to prospective adoptive families or guardians of foster youth, and required specialized permanency services be provided to certain youth.

AB 1997 (Stone), Chapter 612, Statutes of 2016, furthered CCR efforts made by AB 403.

AB 403 (Stone), Chapter 773, Statutes of 2015, implemented CCR recommendations to better serve children and youth in California’s child welfare services system.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

California Alliance of Caregivers
Los Angeles LGBT Center

Opposition

None on file

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