

March 3, 2021

The Honorable Nancy Skinner, Chair
Senate Budget & Fiscal Review Committee
State Capitol, Room 5019
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Phil Ting, Chair
Assembly Budget Committee
State Capitol, Room 6026
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: CHILD WELFARE SERVICES: FAMILY FIRST PREVENTION SERVICES

Dear Senator Skinner and Assembly Member Ting:

The organizations below respectfully request your support for an augmentation of \$50 million General Fund (GF) in FY 2021-22, and \$100 million on-going, to build locally driven services and supports for children, youth and families at risk of entering foster care. The goal of this effort is to keep families safely together and prevent the need for entries into the foster care system whenever possible. This investment would leverage federal Title IV-E funding to support counties' work with communities of color to strengthen families that are disproportionately represented in the child welfare system, in order to address and reduce known inequities and disparities in the system.

Recent historic legislation - the federal Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) of 2018 - provides a \$1 match for every \$1 invested for evidence-based prevention services in the areas of mental health, substance abuse, in-home parenting skills, and kinship navigator programs. Our organizations see FFPSA as the catalyst to enable California to begin shifting towards a child welfare system that looks first to strengthen families and communities through a broad array of culturally relevant prevention services developed and delivered in partnership with local communities.

Historically, California counties have relied upon a very limited and inadequate pool of federal funds to deliver direct services to children, youth and families served by child welfare. These funds have largely been focused on youth and families to help families reunify after a removal. Until recently, seven counties participated in a Title IV-E demonstration waiver for flexible funding, but the authority for this waiver has expired, leaving counties with few options for providing direct services intended to support families to safely stay together and prevent entry into the foster care system.

Disparities and disproportionality in the child welfare system that have persisted for years have been amplified and made worse with the stressors caused by the pandemic, which has negatively and disproportionately impacted communities of color. Statewide data indicates that between July 2019 and June 2020, 51.3% of children who entered foster care were reunified with their families, suggesting that if high quality services could have been provided prior to removal, the need for foster care could potentially have been averted for some families. FFPSA provides the opportunity for counties to build services and tangible supports needed by families and in turn, begin to invest in a broader prevention continuum in collaboration with their local communities.

In order to begin this critical work, we respectfully request your support for \$50 million GF in FY 2021-22 (which leverages up to \$50 million in additional federal funding), and \$100 million GF on an on-going basis, to be invested in the following ways:

- \$45 million GF (\$95 million ongoing) for direct services and supports to children, youth and families including mental health, substance abuse, in-home parenting skills, and kinship

navigator programs as well as tangible supports for families. Services may also be provided to pregnant and parenting foster youth. This proposal requires collaborations with community-based organizations and coordination of services available through other state and local programs. The exact array of available services, and family engagement strategies, would be locally driven through a robust community-based planning process.

- \$4 million GF (initial and on-going) for state infrastructure necessary to meet federal FFPSA requirements including evaluation, reporting, and supporting model fidelity.
- \$1 million GF (initial and on-going) for training to build the knowledge and skills for community-based service providers and county staff to deliver evidence-based, culturally informed and promising practices.

This investment will support early prevention efforts to prevent removals from the home, keeping families together with services, reducing the risk of future maltreatment, and promoting the safety and well-being of the child within their family unit. It is important that the state provide the critical funding necessary to begin building out these prevention services to move the child welfare system further in the direction of supporting families in need and reducing known disparities in the system with a particular focus on communities overrepresented in the system today.

For all these reasons, we urge your support for this request.

Sincerely,

The Undersigned Organizations

cc: Chris Woods, Office of the Senate President Pro Tempore
Mareva Brown, Office of the Senate President Pro Tempore
Jason Sisney, Office of the Speaker of the Assembly
Gail Gronert, Office of the Speaker of the Assembly
Renita Polk, Senate Budget and Fiscal Review Subcommittee No. 3
Nicole Vazquez, Assembly Committee on Budget Subcommittee No. 1
Rebecca Hamilton, Senate Republican Fiscal Office
Joe Shinstock, Assembly Republican Fiscal Office
Eric Dietz, Assembly Republican Fiscal Office
David Stammerjohan, Office of Senator Talamantes Eggman
Karen Jones, Office of Assembly Member Arambula
Jessica Bartholow, Office of Senator Skinner
Ginni Bella Navarre, Legislative Analyst's Office
Angela Short, Legislative Analyst's Office
Richard Figueroa, Office of the Governor
Tam Ma, Office of the Governor
Marko Mijic, Health and Human Services Agency
Paula Villescaz, Health and Human Services Agency
Kim Johnson, California Department of Social Services
Jennifer Troia, California Department of Social Services
Angie Schwartz, California Department of Social Services

Salena Chow, California Department of Social Services
Robert Smith, California Department of Social Services
Adam Dorsey, HHS, Department of Finance
Justin Freitas, HHS, Department of Finance
Jennifer Lopez, HHS, Department of Finance
Justin Garrett, California Association of Counties County Caucus
County Welfare Directors Association of California