

April 1<sup>st</sup>, 2022

TO: The Honorable Phil Ting, Assembly Committee on Budget

The Honorable Dr. Joaquin Arambula Chair, Assembly Budget Subcommittee No. 1

Honorable Members of Assembly Budget Subcommittee No. 1

**RE: Support a Crucial Care Component in the CWS Services Continuum: Utilize \$18.75 Million State General Funds Over Two Years to Stabilize Foster Family Agencies**

We the undersigned are in strong support of Assemblymember Blanca E. Rubio's request of \$18.75 Million in one-time State General Funds (SGF), provided over two years, to stabilize Foster Family Agencies (FFAs) - the entities that provide placement and support to ¼ of the foster children in home-based care across California.

California legislators and stakeholders remain committed to enacting the vision of Continuum of Care Reform (CCR) and systematically moving youth out of congregate care into home-based settings whenever possible. Foster Family Agencies (FFAs), private nonprofits that recruit and approve resource parents and provide services to the children in their care, support 1 in 4 youth placed in home-based care in this state. FFAs are integral to achieving the vision of CCR and provide a crucial care component in the child welfare services continuum. Without adequately trained and supported resource families CCR's vision of reducing foster youth in congregate care cannot be achieved.

Typically, children and youth who are placed in FFA homes are those who have elevated needs, for whom it is more difficult to locate family-based placement. FFAs often recruit, train and approve families *specifically* for children and youth who need higher acuity supports and services. These programs specialize in supporting and caring for:

- Children and youth with intellectual or physical disabilities
- Medically Fragile and Special Health Care Needs populations
- Commercially Sexually Exploited Children and Youth (CSEC)
- Large sibling groups
- Probation youth
- LGBTQ youth
- Teenagers and older foster youth
- Youth with high acuity behavioral health needs
- Parenting youth

### **Supporting FFAs Improves Permanency Outcomes for Foster Youth by Reducing FFA Social Worker Turnover**

Multiple research studies show that the loss of a social worker negatively and significantly affects the life of a foster child.<sup>1</sup> Each time a child or youth loses a social worker, their permanency plans are disrupted. Increases in the number of social workers during the life of a child's case are correlated to decreasing rates of permanency. Foster children with more than one social worker are almost 60% less likely to reach permanency compared to children with just one social worker.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Bowman, E. M., *Attachment Theory, Supervision, and Turnover in Child Welfare*, Child Welfare, Vol. 97, Issue 1, January 1, 2019.

<sup>2</sup> Flower, C., McDonald, J., & Sumski, M. (2005). *Review of turnover in Milwaukee county private agency child welfare ongoing case management staff*. Milwaukee: Bureau of Milwaukee Child Welfare.

In addition, youth in foster care are already struggling with loss and trauma- which is compounded each time they lose their social worker. Youth report feeling a lack of emotional and physical stability due to changes in social workers and feeling re-traumatization similar to when they were first removed from their families. The instability produced by revolving social workers reinforces the lack of stability in a child's life and reifies the belief that adults are unreliable.<sup>3</sup>

### **Exceptionally High Turnover Among FFA Social Workers Who are Predominantly Female and Have Master's Degrees, Yet Lowest Paid**

As the COVID emergency drives continued instability and change in almost every arena of life for foster children, many of whom have already experienced profound periods of instability, FFA social workers remain a vital constant in their lives. The funding being requested will help solve the problem of high Foster Family Agency social worker turnover, which was at 59% *before* the COVID emergency.<sup>4</sup>

FFAs provide homes for 25% of all foster youth in home-based care and 90% of all children and youth in Intensive Services Foster Care. FFA social workers must have a Master's degree and are required to be available 24/7 for families and children; yet, child welfare social workers employed by FFAs are among the lowest paid of all child social worker professionals. Moreover, 88% identify as female and many are themselves from communities of poverty who choose this profession to give back to their communities and to help others.<sup>5</sup>

### **Additional Federal Funding is Identified in the New Foster Family Agency Social Worker Time Study; New Rate Structure Forthcoming Makes this a One-Time Financial Ask to Support FFAs**

FFAs are one of just two child welfare placements that do not receive an annual Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) to their rate, although they are beholden to the same realities of inflation and growing operating costs as every other social service provider. This budget request is to apply the COLA based on the California Necessities Index (CNI)- to the administrative component of the FFA rate, for FY 22-23 and FY 23-24. This will allow FFAs to retain social work staff and continue providing crucial home-based care to foster youth in the coming 2 years, until CDSS establishes a new social services rate correlated to the Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths (CANS) Comprehensive Assessment.

During the past six years, there have only been two adjustments to support the work of FFA social workers; one 4.15% Cost of Living Adjustment and one \$50 per child per month increase to the social work component of the FFA rate. This is creating an untenable burden on FFAs to provide necessary funding to support the social workers who serve children and families; this then leads to permanency disruption and re-traumatization for foster youth. The role we are asking our FFA Social Workers to play in the lives of these children is profoundly important, and we must ensure these committed providers are secure to keep fulfilling this role.

There is a federal funding source that can be leveraged to offset this one-time, two-year SGF ask. The funding to offset this SGF may be allocated from the savings from the 2021 FFA Social Worker Time Study that is accruing new federal matching funds for federally eligible activities that are separate and in furtherance of activities performed by a county social worker. As of 2019, 70% of FFA social worker activities are now eligible for federal funding.

### **Looking Ahead: One-Time Augmentation to FFAs to Protect Permanency Outcomes for Youth**

There is ongoing strain on the state's child welfare system in the face of the continued COVID emergency. Foster Family Agencies support 1 in 4 foster youth in home-based care, many of whom have complex and persistent behavioral health needs. However, FFAs are facing significant challenges in meeting rising administrative costs

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<sup>3</sup> Strolin-Goltzman, J., Kollar, S. and Trinkle, J. *Listening to the Voices of Children in Foster Care: Youths Speak Out about Child Welfare Workforce Turnover and Selection*. *Social Work*, Volume 55, Issue 1, January 2010, Pages 47–53, <https://doi.org/10.1093/sw/55.1.47>

<sup>4</sup> CACFS-conducted survey of 37 of the largest Foster Family Agencies in the state, 2019.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, 2019.

and retaining the needed workforce to provide this crucial component of the child welfare services continuum; this is damaging to the well-being and permanency outcomes for foster youth and hinders the progress of Continuum of Care Reform.

We are asking the Legislature to prioritize foster children and youth by stabilizing the Foster Family Agencies that care for them. We respectfully request \$18.75 million SGF, one-time, to increase permanency by reinvesting in FFA social workers to reduce social worker turnover. Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

