

Continuum of Care Group Home Reform

Background

Governor Brown signed AB 403 (Stone) in October 2015, eliminating most group homes starting in January 2017 and ushering in a foundational shift for the state's foster youth.

The goal of the bill, called "Continuum of Care Reform" (CCR), is to provide better, more appropriate care and services for foster children in home-based settings and to reduce the time spent in congregate care, or group homes. This will require investing in recruitment, training, and retention of foster care homes, changing how and where behavioral health services are provided, reclassifying the group home system, and revising overall rates for remaining high-level group home placements.

AB 403 will be a significant undertaking for all involved—the state, county departments (including child welfare services, behavioral health, and probation), group homes, foster agencies, families, and advocates. By working together and ensuring all parts of the system are ready and adequately resourced to meet the needs of children, counties believe that the Continuum of Care reforms of AB 403 will be a landmark of system-wide change to better serve vulnerable children.

In the meantime, counties will continue to meet their statutory responsibility for the health, safety, and behavioral health needs of foster and probation youth.

AB 403 will require, at a minimum, funding for capacity building and new practice requirements in county child welfare services, probation, and mental health agencies.

The Governor has proposed \$96 million for foster family recruitment and probation services in his 2016-17 January budget. While the funding is welcome, it falls far short of what is needed for implementation and ongoing activities associated with AB 403—especially since the bill requires a reformed group home system just 10 short months from now.

The state, at the very least, must adequately fund implementation activities. CSAC is working with the County Welfare Directors Association, the Chief Probation Officers of California, and the County Behavioral Health Directors Association to determine county funding needs for AB 403 implementation.

CSAC is also working on ongoing Proposition 30 questions surrounding AB 403 costs to affected county departments, which were realigned to counties in 2011.

The Department of Social Services is also working with the Legislature to craft a "clean up" bill for AB 403, AB 1997, also by Assembly Member Stone. CSAC will continue to advocate on both the fiscal and policy issues related to AB 403 implementation.

Talking Points

- The state **must adequately fund implementation activities**, especially given the short time allowed to fully reform the group home system.
- The \$96 million proposed by the Governor for probation and recruiting foster families **falls far short** of what is needed to both implement and subsequently run the new system.

