

January 19, 2024

The Honorable Nancy Skinner, Chair
Senate Budget & Fiscal Review Committee
1020 N Street, Room 502
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Jesse Gabriel, Chair
Assembly Committee on Budget
1021 O Street, Room 8230
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Elimination of Critical Supports for Children and Youth in Foster Care: Family Urgent Response System (FURS) – OPPOSE

Dear Senator Skinner and Assembly Member Gabriel:

The undersigned organizations strongly oppose the elimination of dedicated supports and services for California's children and youth in foster care as proposed in the Governor's 2024-25 budget (more than \$70 million General Fund ongoing), especially the proposed elimination of the Family Urgent Response System (FURS). These critical programs ensure children and youth in foster care have access to the stability, trauma-informed supports, and housing they need to heal from abuse, neglect, and removal from their communities. The Governor's proposed budget threatens to harm the very children and youth the State has a moral and legal obligation to support and protect.

Among these cuts to child welfare programs, the budget proposes to eliminate FURS (\$30 million General Fund ongoing), which was created by and for youth currently or formerly in foster care and their caregivers to provide critically needed, immediate, 24/7, individualized, trauma-informed support. Established in 2019 by Senate Bill 80, FURS consists of a statewide hotline and county mobile response systems that respond to any situation where youth or caregivers have identified the need for extra support, including those with the potential to lead to placement disruptions or unnecessary contact with law enforcement. This coordinated state and community-based solution helps preserve relationships and placements in family homes, link youth and families to longer-term supports and services, promote healing, and prevent the criminalization of youth who have experienced trauma. FURS is also a critical resource to promote stability for older youth (up to age 21) currently or formerly in foster care who are living on their own.

Since FURS launched in 2021, utilization has grown steadily with more than 11,000 calls placed to the statewide hotline. Many of those calls have resulted in an in-person response from a county mobile response team. Initial data shows that the vast majority of these calls have resulted in stabilized placements and ongoing supports for the child, youth, and/or caregiver. Moreover, there are hundreds of stories about how FURS has:

- Helped new relationships develop and grow when a child first becomes part of the family.
- Supported caregivers and youth as they work through disagreements.
- Connected youth to community-based resources and supports to meet their unique needs.
- Resolved barriers students in foster care experience attending and thriving in school.
- Ensured caregivers have access to the supports they need for the wellbeing of the children and youth in their care.

FURS plays a critical role in improving outcomes for children and youth in foster care. Eliminating this vital program will place these children and youth at greater risk of instability, disrupted relationships, loss, and re-traumatization.

We appreciate that California is facing a budget deficit. However, we must not address this shortfall at the expense of our children and youth in foster care to whom the State has a legal and moral responsibility. We strongly urge you to uphold California's duty to these children and youth and reject the Governor's proposal to eliminate funding for FURS and the other eliminated programs and services pivotal to their safety and wellbeing.

Sincerely,

The Undersigned Organizations

Agape Villages Foster Family Agency
Aging UP
Alliance for Children's Rights
Allies for Every Child
Aspiranet
Association of Community Human Service
Agencies
California Alliance of Caregivers
California Alliance of Child and Family
Services
California Coalition for Youth
California State Association
of Counties
California Youth Connection
Child Care Law Center
Children First Foster Family Agency
Children Now
Children's Advocacy Institute
Children's Bureau of Southern
California
Children's Law Center of California
City and County of San Francisco
County Behavioral Health Directors
Association
County of Los Angeles Department of
Children and Family Services
County of Sonoma Human Services
Department
County Welfare Directors Association
of California
Crittenton Services

Dimondale Adolescent Care Facility
Disability Rights California
East Bay Children's Law Offices
Extraordinary Families
First Place for Youth
Fostering Unity
Fred Finch Youth & Family Services
Hanna Center
Hillsides
iFoster
John Burton Advocates for Youth
Koinonia Family Services
Law Foundation of Silicon Valley
LMT & Associates, Inc.
Loyola Marymount Center for Equity for
English Learners
Mary's Path
Mental Health America of San Diego County
Pacific Clinics
Public Counsel
Sacramento Children's Home
San Francisco Human Services Agency
SEIU California
Seneca Family of Agencies
TLC Child & Family Services
Trinity Youth Services
Vista Del Mar Child and Family Services
VOICES Youth Services
Wayfinder Family Services
WestCoast Children's Clinic
Western Center on Law & Poverty

