



# NEWS RELEASE

California Department of Social Services

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## **California Department of Social Services Receives \$14.5 million Grant to Improve Foster Care Permanency**

*Funding Will Help Identify and Overcome Obstacles for Foster Youth*

SACRAMENTO – The California Department of Social Services (CDSS) today announced the award of a new five-year grant from the federal Administration for Children & Families (ACF) of up to \$14.5 million dollars that will allow CDSS to focus on improving outcomes of foster children in California, in particular African-American and Native-American youth have been identified as having significant barriers to finding permanent homes and experiencing longer stays in foster care. This grant provides the means to help identify and overcome barriers to permanency.

“I am elated today with two significant accomplishments, \$14.5 million to assist foster youth disproportionately represented in the foster care system and Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger’s signature of AB 12 which extends foster care benefits for foster youth from age 18 to age 21,” said CDSS Director John Wagner. “I look forward to using these resources and the provisions of the new law to help improve the foster care system for all California foster children and youth.”

Over the last decade, California has reduced its foster care population by roughly 40 percent due to investments in efforts to find permanent families for children and more recently in efforts to prevent the need for children to enter foster care. This grant will enable California to take these efforts to the next level.

Despite the inroads made into caseload reductions, certain groups of foster children and youth have disproportionately higher representation and longer periods within the foster care system. This five-year grant from ACF will allow CDSS to work in partnership with the Administrative Office of the Courts, philanthropy, local and non-profit agencies to examine and identify barriers and to provide solutions for these specific sub-groups.

The ultimate goal is to also introduce an updated and integrated, casework practice model that will be customized for replication statewide. The partnership will also develop a system that can achieve fiscal sustainability and will include reinvestment and will support longer term, systemic change.

The pilot counties include: Fresno, Humboldt, Los Angeles and Santa Clara, which have prior experience implementing innovative child welfare strategies and have a significant representation of the target population. These counties account for nearly 40% of the statewide child welfare system in foster care throughout California.

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Studies have shown that former foster youth are less likely to complete high school, attend college, or be employed, and are at a higher risk for becoming homeless, arrested or incarcerated. AB 12 aims to reduce this correlation by providing foster youth between the age of 18 and 21 a better support system to stay in school and obtain employment. In addition to continuing foster care services to this age group, the legislation allows California to take advantage of federal funding through participation in kinship guardianship assistance payments. California was one of the first states to establish the Kinship Guardianship Assistance Payment program to provide financial assistance for children that are placed under legal guardianship with a relative and, now under this legislation, federal funding will be available to support these payments.

In addition to signing AB 12, Governor Schwarzenegger yesterday announced he signed the following six bills to protect and enhance the benefits and services available to California's foster youth:

- [AB 743](#) by Assemblymember Anthony Portantino (D-La Cañada Flintridge) to help keep siblings together in the foster care system. The bill clearly defines a required timeframe of ten days that the child welfare system must notify the child's attorney before a planned separation of siblings.
- [AB 1933](#) by Assemblymember Julia Brownley (D-Santa Monica) to allow foster children to continue attending their school of origin and, if applicable, secondary schools in the same attendance area, when placed with a family in a different neighborhood.
- [SB 1353](#) by Senator Roderick Wright (D-Inglewood) to require consideration of the proximity to the school in which a child is enrolled at the time of placement in foster care is one indicator of the best interests of the child with respect to educational stability.
- [SB 654](#) by Senator Mark Leno (D-San Francisco) to expand eligibility for Independent Living Program (ILP) services to youth who are former dependents of the juvenile court placed with nonrelated legal guardians and are receiving permanent placement services, regardless of the age at which dependency was dismissed, but only if the youth's guardianship was ordered after his or her eighth birthday. This allows some former foster youth who left foster care prior to aging out to later seek ILP services, until age 20.
- [AB 1905](#) by Assemblymember Paul Cook (R-Yucca Valley) to ensure continued approval and payments for foster youth relative or extended family member caregivers, pending the annual reassessment visit.
- [AB 1758](#) by Assemblymember Tom Ammiano (D-San Francisco) to add nonrelative extended family members to the list of family members and guardians eligible for foster care wraparound services, and allows certain dependent or ward categorically eligible foster youth to remain eligible for Medi-Cal.

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