



CDSS

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DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES

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EDMUND G. BROWN JR.
GOVERNOR

REASON FOR THIS TRANSMITTAL

- State Law Change
- Federal Law or Regulation Change
- Court Order
- Clarification Requested by One or More Counties
- Initiated by CDSS

October 8, 2015

ALL COUNTY LETTER NO. 15-76

TO: ALL COUNTY WELFARE DIRECTORS
ALL CHIEF PROBATION OFFICERS
ALL CHILD WELFARE SERVICES PROGRAM MANAGERS
ALL COUNTY PROBATION OFFICERS
ALL FOSTER CARE MANAGERS

SUBJECT: FOSTER PARENT RECRUITMENT, RETENTION, AND SUPPORT
(FPRRS) FUNDING OPPORTUNITY

REFERENCE: [BUDGET ACT OF 2015, SENATE BILL \(SB\) 97](#), (CHAPTER 11, STATUTES OF 2015); [ASSEMBLY BILL \(AB\) 403](#), (ENROLLED BILL, STATUTES OF 2015); [SB 1013](#), (CHAPTER 35, STATUTES OF 2012); WELFARE AND INSTITUTIONS CODE (W&IC) SECTIONS [11461.2](#) and [11467](#).

This All County Letter (ACL) provides instruction to county welfare departments for the development of plans for recruiting, retaining, and supporting foster parents, resource families, and relative caregivers. The approval of the 2015 Budget Act (SB 97) includes funding to help support the implementation of legislation expected to be adopted to improve California’s child welfare system through the Continuum of Care Reform (CCR) initiative. Further, AB 403, which will add W&IC section 16003.5 once the bill is enacted, is incorporated in this ACL. This ACL will address the specifics for county plan contents and submission.

Please note: A separate ACL and county plan template will be sent out to Chief Probation Officers that will be specific to county probation. This ACL is for child welfare only, but is being provided to county probation officers as background information.

BACKGROUND

In September 2012, the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) in partnership with the counties launched the CCR effort. The CDSS, along with county partners and stakeholders, developed recommendations to revise the state’s current rate setting system, service provision, and programs serving minor and non-minor juvenile court

dependents and families in the continuum of Aid to Families with Dependent Children – Foster Care (AFDC-FC) eligible placement settings.

As a result of the CCR efforts, a detailed [CCR Legislative Report](#) was developed and provided to the California Legislature in January 2015. This action plan contained information on current reform improvements made administratively and recommended revisions to improve the continuum of care for juvenile court dependents through legislative action. The report outlined a comprehensive approach to improving the experience and outcomes of children and young adults in foster care. The report, based on over three years of collaboration with county partners and other stakeholders, consists of a series of interdependent recommendations to improve assessments of minors, non-minor dependents (NMD), and families to make more informed and appropriate initial placement decisions, emphasize home-based family care placements, appropriately support those placements with available services, change the goals for congregate (group home) care placements, and increase transparency and accountability for outcomes.

A specific recommendation was made to strengthen foster parent, resource family and relative caregiver retention, recruitment, training requirements and strategies. The recommendation envisions these caregivers to be active partners with public child welfare workers and service providers, and as such must also be provided with the necessary supports to retain them. To support this recommendation, funding has been made available for counties to invest in activities to retain and increase the number of foster parents, relative caregivers and resource families available for placement of court dependent minors and NMDs.

COUNTY FPRRS PLAN

There are two appropriations available in the 2015-16 state budget:

1. \$2.7 million¹, available to both child welfare and county probation departments for foster caregiver retention, recruitment, support and training strategies and goals; and
2. \$15 million, of which \$14.5 million, is available only to child welfare departments for foster caregiver retention, recruitment, support and training strategies and goals.

The remaining \$500,000 is earmarked for use by CDSS to identify and implement best practices and strategies.

The appropriated funds must be used to supplement and not supplant resources the county already dedicates to the activities the county currently engages in as described in “Use of Funds” below. Title IV-E funds can be used as a match to State General Funds to cover some of the costs below for counties who are non-Title IV-E waiver

¹ A small portion of this appropriation may be used for work with county probation departments.

counties. A County Fiscal Letter (CFL) will be issued in the near future that will outline what costs are eligible for Title IV-E and those that are not.

Although it is anticipated that future appropriations will be made to continue county implementation of strategies and achievement of identified goals, continuation of the \$14.5 million appropriation in future fiscal years is contingent on appropriation in the annual Budget Act. Since funds are limited at this time, counties should be realistic in these plans and consider sustainability for the future. The county plans will require a thoughtful review by counties under a short timeline; however, the counties are requested to submit plans that will provide CDSS with information to inform future Administration and legislative decisions concerning future appropriations.

Counties are reminded that the existing savings being realized from the Adoption Assistance Payment AFDC-FC delinks can also be a source of funding to accomplish their retention, recruitment, and support goals. (See [CFL 14-15/63](#) dated May 21, 2015 and [CFL 14-15/63-E](#) dated August 6, 2015).

The CDSS will provide available funding to counties based on approval of a plan submitted by each county, or a region of counties, that requests funding. Each county plan must include:

- An assessment of the current capacity in home-based care and anticipated need for increased capacity to prepare for AB 403 implementation.
- A definition of the specific goal or goals the county intends to achieve related to increasing the capacity and use of home-based family care and the provision of services and supports to foster caregivers;
- A description of the strategy or strategies the county proposes to pursue to address the goal/goals;
- An explanation or rationale for the proposed strategy or strategies, relative to the goal/goals; and
- A list or description of the outcomes, including baseline data for those outcomes.

A template, along with instructions for the county FPRRS plan, is attached.

Criteria for the approval of county plans will be developed by CDSS following consultation with County Welfare Directors Association (CWDA). Counties may, and are encouraged to, collaborate regionally in the development and submission of their plans.

USE OF FUNDS

The funds allocated must be used for activities and services to retain, recruit, and support foster parents, relative caregivers, and resource families. Allowable expenditures include, but are not limited to the following:

- Staffing to provide and improve direct services and supports to foster parents, relative caregivers, and resource families;
- Removal of barriers in those areas defined as priorities in the county's FPRRS plan and subsequent reports on outcomes;
- Exceptional child needs not covered by the caregiver-specific rate that would normalize the child's experience, stabilize the placement, or enhance the dependent's wellbeing;
- Child care;
- Intensive relative finding, engagement and navigation efforts; and
- Emerging technological, evidence-informed, or other non-traditional approaches for outreach to potential foster parents, relative caregivers, and resource families.

Per [CFL 97/98-26](#) non-traditional approaches may be utilized in recruitment.

Counties receiving funding for their approved plans will be required to report the outcomes achieved through the use of the funds and the activities that contributed to those outcomes. The specific requirements for reporting will be developed via collaboration among CDSS and CWDA. The CDSS will issue further instruction under subsequent and separate cover regarding submission of data reports to be submitted to CDSS by September 30, of the year following the end of the fiscal year in which the funding was available. Using these reports, CDSS has the responsibility to share best practices among counties and periodically update the Legislature.

TRIBAL COLLABORATION AND INVOLVEMENT

Counties are encouraged to consider its placement needs for tribal youth and collaborate with tribes to ensure needs unique to Native American children in foster care are included.

COUNTY PLAN TEMPLATE

Instructions regarding the submittal of the required county plan template are provided at the end of this ACL. Counties are encouraged to develop and submit thorough, collaborative, multi-year plans for potential future investment in order to make the plan successful, while prioritizing strategies for immediate and longer-term implementation. The CDSS will use these plans for updating budget requests to the Legislature.

The criteria for funding to each county with an approved county plan will be based on a review, evaluation, and analysis of the submitted county plan. The CDSS instructs counties to note the following important timelines:

- County FPRRS plan due to CDSS No later than Tuesday, December 1, 2015, by 5 p.m.
- Award Letters Granted On a flow basis, but within a week of receipt of the county plan.

Counties may start returning the county FPRRS plan as soon as possible. The CDSS will begin issuing allocations via county-specific award letters within a week of receipt of the county plan to those counties with an approved plan. The award letters will provide the county-specific funding and claiming instructions. After the December 1, 2015, deadline, it is possible that CDSS will allocate additional funds in the event that not all counties submit plans or some counties submit plans with minimal funding.

Please note: County plans must be sent electronically to kinship.care@dss.ca.gov.

Although the timing of the request for county plans and the approval and funding of individual plans on a rolling basis is not the typical process, it is necessary given the urgency of beginning to plan for AB 403 implementation. It is expected that the information provided through the multi-year county plans will be valuable for future budget discussions with the Legislature.

QUESTIONS

Any questions regarding this policy of this ACL should be directed to the Foster Caregiver Policy and Support Unit at (916) 651-7465 or via email at kinship.care@dss.ca.gov. Questions concerning fiscal claiming and reporting should be directed to fiscal.systems@dss.ca.gov.

Sincerely,

Original Document Signed By:

GREGORY E. ROSE
Deputy Director
Children and Family Services Division

Attachment

c: CWDA

2015 Foster and Relative Caregiver Recruitment, Retention and Support Plan County

This document is intended to be used by the county to assess:

- Current and anticipated needs for foster caregiver capacity.
- Current efforts to recruit, train, retain and support foster and relative caregivers.
- Identified barriers, obstacles and challenges which negatively impact current efforts.
- Proposed new efforts and/or augmentation of existing efforts to be implemented using state funds allocated to the county under the Budget Act of 2015.

The information contained in this plan will be reviewed by the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) and will help to inform the amount of funding to be allocated to the county and future needs for funding. The All County Letter (ACL) accompanying this document describes more fully the funding made available through the Budget Act of 2015 (Senate Bill 97, Chapter 11, Statutes of 2015) for county efforts to recruit, retain, and support relative and non-related foster caregivers.

PART I. – COUNTY CONTACT INFORMATION

Child Welfare Director Name:	Phone Number:
Email Address:	FAX Number:
Street Address or P.O. Box:	City, State, ZIP Code:

Program Contact Name:	Phone Number:
Email Address:	FAX Number:
Street Address or P.O. Box:	City, State, ZIP Code:

PART II – CAPACITY NEEDS

The statewide Continuum of Care Reform (CCR) effort focuses on minimizing placements of children in congregate care settings (at present, primarily group homes). The CCR plans to eliminate “low-level” group home (Rate Classification Level (RCL) 0-11) placements, instead placing children in home-based family settings. Placements in “high-level” (RCL 12-14) group homes (going forward, short-term residential treatment centers (STRTCs)) will be made when necessary for when a child who cannot safely receive care and services in a family-based setting. Placements into STRTCs will be of limited duration (up to six months), and will be followed by a “step-down” to a home-based family setting. This means that counties will face an increased need for family-based care above and beyond their current capacity. Since STRTC placements are short-term, the goal is to transition youth from the STRTC to family-based care, counties will also need to build capacity to step-down youth in group homes/STRTCs to family-based care settings. In addition, other factors influence placements and retention in a county. For example, foster caregivers who are unable to care for foster children, due to lack of supports or services, may result in placement moves for the child, and the greater the number of placement moves increases the probability that a child will be eventually placed into a group home. Also, for children placed out of county, those youth and caregivers face greater challenges in accessing needed supports and services.

Importantly, CDSS strongly believes that the recruitment of non-related caregivers alone will not be sufficient to meet the ongoing foster care capacity needs of counties, and that greater effort must be made to finding, retaining and supporting relative caregivers. It is also clear that relative finding alone is insufficient—that relatives must also be supported and services must be available in the home. Research has shown that that foster youth placed with kin experience fewer placements (which reduces social worker workload and improves child well-being) have more frequent and consistent contact with siblings and birth parents (which can aid in reunification efforts and improves child well-being), have fewer negative emotions about being placed into foster care than youth placed with non-relatives, are less likely to run away and are more likely to graduate.

With this in mind, counties should consider building capacity by considering the following factors:

PLEASE COMPLETE THIS INFORMATION BELOW:

Group Home/STRTC Impact:

SHORT-TERM CAPACITY NEED: How many children are currently residing in group homes placed by your county (include both in-county and out-of-county placements)? _____

Assume that most or all of these children will be transitioning to home-based family settings in the near future and that relative, non-relative extended family member (NREFM) or non-related caregivers will need to be located for them.

LONG-TERM CAPACITY NEED: Based on historical trends (past three years), approximately how many children have been placed in group homes in the county each year under your county jurisdiction? _____

Assume that most or all of these children will either be placed in a home-based family setting immediately, or placed in an STRTC and subsequently transition to a home-based family setting, and that relative, NREFM or non-related caregivers will need to be located for them.

MAGNITUDE OF ANTICIPATED CAPACITY INCREASE:

Number of children under county's Child Welfare Services (CWS) jurisdiction: _____
Anticipated growth or decline in children under CWS jurisdiction based on current trends in the next three years: _____

Number of children under county jurisdiction in all types of home-based foster care (relative, NREFM, licensed non-related caregiver or resource family, foster family agencies).

Number of non-related, licensed foster homes in the county: _____

Number and percent of children in the care of non-related licensed foster homes: _____

Number and percent of children in the care of relatives/NREFMs: _____

Number and percent of first placements with relative caregivers (avg/year): _____

Number and percent of children/youth placed in county (avg/year): _____

Number and percent of youth placed out of county (avg/year): _____

Placement stability (avg/year): _____

Retention – does your county track turnover of licensed foster parents? If so, what is the current turnover rate? _____

TARGET INCREASES: Based on the aforementioned data, how does the county plan to focus its efforts?

Target increase for new licensed foster homes (number and percent): _____

Target increase in percent placements with relatives: _____

Target increase in first placement with relatives (percent): _____

Target decrease in foster parent turnover (percent): _____

There are approximately _____ households in the county (according to the latest census data) from which non-relative caregivers may be found.

Has your county identified avoidable causes of turnover and strategies to reduce the rate? If yes, please describe the strategies. If not, how does your county plan to determine the need for such strategies?

PART III – PROPOSED PRACTICES AND EXPECTED OUTCOMES

In this section, the county should identify any new activities and programs, or augmentations of existing activities and programs, which it proposes to implement utilizing funds received pursuant to the Budget Act of 2015 (SB 97). Allowable expenditures include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Staffing to provide and improve direct services and supports to licensed foster family homes, approved resource families, and relative caregivers, and to remove any barriers in those areas defined as priorities in the county implementation plan and subsequent reports on outcomes.
- Exceptional child needs not covered by the caregiver-specific rate that would normalize the child's experience, stabilize the placement, or enhance the child's well-being.
- Child care for licensed foster parents, approved resource families, and relative caregivers.
- Emerging technological, evidence-informed or other non-traditional approaches to outreach to potential foster family homes, resource families, and relatives.
- Intensive relative finding, engagement, and navigation efforts.

The CDSS will evaluate proposals to ensure the county's strategies take into consideration the needs as described in the data section and the degree to which strategies build on existing effective practices or practices likely to improve recruitment, retention and support. The CDSS will work with the county to provide technical assistance as necessary for plans not meeting desired expectations.

In this section, identify all activities related to increasing the capacity and use of home-based family care and the provision of services and supports to caregivers and rank these activities by priority for funding, in descending order of priority (e.g. Rank 1 = highest priority, Rank 2, next highest, etc.).

To the extent possible, specify measurable goals for each activity or program, and indicate the tools and/or methodologies the county intends to utilize to evaluate each activity's/program's progress towards meeting those goals. Please include or reference any available data which tends to support and/or inform the county's strategies for the measurement of outcomes. Some points that may be considered in developing a plan include:

- ***Likelihood of Success:*** The ideal county plan will contain proposed activities and practices which are evidence-based and show a high likelihood of successfully increasing the number of available home-based foster caregivers (both through recruitment/family-finding and through support and retention). If the county proposes to adopt an activity or practice which has been demonstrated to be successful elsewhere, it should consider and anticipate any potential difficulties which may arise from its application in that county, and how it could mitigate those difficulties.

The county plan does not need to include only new and/or untried approaches. If the county proposes to augment a current activity or practice has proven effective in recruitment, family-finding, or support and retention, the county should include in its plan a brief description the effectiveness of the activity or practice above, including how that effectiveness is limited by available funding, and below should explain how an infusion of additional funds is expected to positively impact the scope and/or effectiveness of the activity or program.

- ***Sustainability:*** Additional funding in future fiscal years will be at the discretion of the Legislature and is not guaranteed. Accordingly, while counties are encouraged to develop long-term plans for foster caregiver recruitment, family-finding, and support and retention efforts, if a county proposes to use these funds to commence new activities or programs, it should clearly explain how it intends to continue those efforts beyond June 2016 (i.e., with additional county funds, through public/private partnerships, etc.) or whether continuation of those efforts next fiscal year is dependent upon additional state funds and/or placement cost savings.

The county should identify activities that it is likely to implement or explore beyond the 2015-16 Budget Year to help inform future budgetary needs for local capacity building. Add additional boxes as needed.

Activity/Program Name/Title:
Activity/Program Description (limit to 250 words):
Is this a new activity or expansion of a current activity? New (y/n) Expansion (y/n) If an expansion, describe current population that is served and expansion population:
Approximate Anticipated Cost of This Activity/Program:
Describe any planned partnerships or funding to support this activity (e.g. With County Mental Health, local agencies, foster caregivers, foundations, etc.):
Goal(s) and Desired Outcomes (mark all that apply): <input type="checkbox"/> Increase # of county licensed foster parents/resource families by _____ number and percent <input type="checkbox"/> Increase # of placements with relatives by _____ number and percent <input type="checkbox"/> Improve placement stability _____ number and percent <input type="checkbox"/> Reduce use of congregate care _____ number and percent Other (list any others): _____ number and percent
Rationale for choosing this activity to meet the aforementioned goal(s):
<i>Priority Rank of This Activity/Program in Relation to Other County Activities/Programs</i> number _____ of _____

Activity/Program Name/Title:
Activity/Program Description (limit to 250 words):
Is this a new activity or expansion of a current activity? New (y/n) Expansion (y/n) If an expansion, describe current population that is served and expansion population:
Approximate Anticipated Cost of This Activity/Program:
Describe any planned partnerships or funding to support this activity (e.g. With County Mental Health, local agencies, foster caregivers, foundations, etc.):

Goal(s) and Desired Outcomes (mark all that apply):

- Increase # of county licensed foster parents/resource families by _____ number and percent
- Increase # of placements with relatives by _____ number and percent
- Improve placement stability _____ number and percent
- Reduce use of congregate care _____ number and percent
- Other (list any others): _____ number and percent

Rationale for choosing this activity to meet the aforementioned goal(s):

Priority Rank of This Activity/Program in Relation to Other County Activities/Programs # _____ of _____

Activity/Program Name/Title:

Activity/Program Description (limit to 250 words):

Is this a new activity or expansion of a current activity?

New (y/n) Expansion (y/n) If an expansion, describe current population that is served and expansion population:

Approximate Anticipated Cost of This Activity/Program:

Describe any planned partnerships or funding to support this activity (e.g. With County Mental Health, local agencies, foster caregivers, foundations, etc.):

Goal(s) and Desired Outcomes (mark all that apply):

- Increase # of county licensed foster parents/resource families by _____ number and percent
- Increase # of placements with relatives by _____ number and percent
- Improve placement stability _____ number and percent
- Reduce use of congregate care _____ number and percent
- Other (list any others): _____ number and percent

Rationale for choosing this activity to meet the aforementioned goal(s):

Priority Rank of This Activity/Program in Relation to Other County Activities/Programs number _____ of _____

Activity/Program Name/Title:
Activity/Program Description (limit to 250 words):
Is this a new activity or expansion of a current activity? New (y/n) Expansion (y/n) If an expansion, describe current population that is served and expansion population:
Approximate Anticipated Cost of This Activity/Program:
Describe any planned partnerships or funding to support this activity (e.g. With County Mental Health, local agencies, foster caregivers, foundations, etc.):
Goal(s) and Desired Outcomes (mark all that apply): <input type="checkbox"/> Increase # of county licensed foster parents/resource families by _____number and percent <input type="checkbox"/> Increase # of placements with relatives by _____number and percent <input type="checkbox"/> Improve placement stability _____number and percent <input type="checkbox"/> Reduce use of congregate care _____number and percent Other (list any others): _____number and percent
Rationale for choosing this activity to meet the aforementioned goal(s):
Priority Rank of This Activity/Program in Relation to Other County Activities/Programs number_____ of _____

For questions concerning the completion of this template, please contact the Foster Caregiver Policy and Support Unit at (916) 651-7465 or via email at kinship.care@dss.ca.gov.
Submit completed plans electronically no later than December 1, 2015, to kinship.care@dss.ca.gov.