

AB 12 Fact Sheet

California Fostering Connections to Success Act Introduced by Assembly Members Beall and Bass

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THE PROBLEM

California assumes the responsibility of a parent for children in foster care who have been removed from their homes because of abuse or neglect. That responsibility continues until foster children exit the system, either to permanency (e.g. by reunification or adoption) or through "emancipation" by reaching an age at which foster care benefits and services are no longer provided.

In 1998, California created a new means of permanency for abused and neglected children by enacting SB 1901 (McPherson). SB 1901 established the Kinship Guardianship Assistance Program (Kin-GAP) to allow foster children to exit the child welfare system to stable and permanent relative guardianships. The Kin-GAP program has been incredibly successful. In 2007-08, there were approximately 14,000 former foster children living with relative guardians and supported by Kin-GAP. Unlike the funding for foster care or adoptions, however, all of the costs of Kin-GAP have been borne by California. The lack of federal support has been especially unfortunate as research shows that children in kinship care have increased stability in their living situations and are less likely to have behavioral problems.

Each year between 4,000 and 5,000 of California's young people "emancipate" from the foster care system and are left to fend for themselves at age 18 or 19, when federal and state funding cease to be available. By contrast, most other young people receive financial and emotional support from a parent well past age 18. As a result of being left on their own at age 18, former foster youth are far more likely than other youth to experience homelessness, unemployment, unplanned pregnancy and involvement with the legal system. Even though research from other states has demonstrated that providing foster care support until age 21 dramatically improves outcomes for these youth, federal and California foster care assistance have ceased by age 19.

THIS BILL

In October 2008 Congress enacted HR 6893: the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act. Consequently, states now have the option to establish relative guardianship programs with federal financial participation in the costs. HR 6893 also allows states to receive federal funds to provide foster care, kinship-guardianship and adoption assistance benefits to support youth who meet certain conditions (e.g. employment and education-related requirements) until age 21. HR 6893 provides an incredible opportunity for California to access federal funding to better the lives of our most vulnerable youth.

AB 12 would ensure that California opts into both of these essential federal funding opportunities. It would: (1) re-enact our existing Kin-GAP program to align with federal requirements and (2) provide transitional support to some youth until age 21. These changes represent fiscally and socially responsible improvements to California's foster care system. As a result, California would use federal funds for costs that are currently borne by the state and counties, and would achieve substantial savings from declines in homelessness, teen pregnancy, unemployment, public assistance, and other expensive outcomes for young adults who would otherwise be forced out of foster care at the age of 18.

CO-SPONSORS

- Alliance of Child & Family Services
- CA Youth Connection
- Children's Law Center of Los Angeles
- County Welfare Directors Association of CA
- John Burton Foundation for Children Without Homes
- Judicial Council of CA
- SEIU State Council
- Youth Law Center

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