



Summary

Relative caregivers are the backbone of our child welfare system. Relative foster placements are more cost effective, tend to lead to more long term placement stability, and offer better connections to the child's community. Yet, counterintuitively, California's child welfare system often provides inadequate information, support and funding to children placed with relatives. While the law requires California to give preference to relative caregivers when finding a home for children in foster care, there is no corresponding requirement to ensure relative caregivers receive the assistance they need to help these vulnerable children thrive. Newly enacted legislation helps to provide foster children placed with relatives additional funding, but counties must opt into the program.

Problem

California's child welfare system uses three funding sources to meet the basic needs of foster children placed with relatives: federal foster care benefits, the Approved Relative Caregiver Funding Option Program (at each county's option), and CalWORKs (TANF). Relative foster parents receive federal foster care benefits if a child meets the federal rules. Unfortunately, because of antiquated federal eligibility rules, at least a third of California foster children are not federally eligible.

As of January 1, 2015, counties will have the option of providing funding equal to the basic foster care payment to foster children placed in the home of relatives utilizing 100% state funds. This new program is called the Approved Relative Caregiver Funding Option Program. However, counties have to opt into the program by October 1, 2014. In addition, children receiving these funds will not be eligible for additional payments such as the infant supplement or specialized care increments.

Those children whose foster care cases are in counties that do not opt into the new program and who do not qualify for federal foster care benefits are eligible to receive CalWORKs. While counties are required to apply for foster care benefits on behalf of a foster child, there is no corresponding requirement that counties apply for CalWORKs benefits for foster children who are placed with relatives. As a result, relatives who step up to care for foster children are obliged to go to the welfare office and apply for CalWORKs, and are often erroneously denied benefits. These administrative barriers often result in

delays in accessing benefits that destabilize relative placements.

Finally, foster children placed with relatives who rely on CalWORKs are denied a range of supports that are given to children receiving foster care benefits. These include the infant supplement that is provided to foster youth who are parenting and specialized care increments.

Solution

- (1) Require county child welfare agencies to provide relative caregivers with information about the financial supports available and the rules for each program.
- (2) Require county child welfare agencies to complete the application for the Approved Relative Caregiver Funding Option Program, if the county has opted in, or CalWORKs benefits on behalf of children placed with relatives.
- (3) Allow foster youth receiving the Approved Relative Caregiver Funding Option Program or CalWORKs benefits to qualify for infant supplements.
- (4) Requires county child welfare agencies to screen every child who is determined ineligible for AFDC-FC benefits for SSI eligibility and make SSI applications on behalf of those screened as likely eligible.

Amendments and Cost Estimate

AB1882 was amended in the Assembly to incorporate the recommendations of the County Welfare Directors Agency (CWDA) and to minimize cost. AB 1882 was also amended to reference the new Approved Relative Caregiver Funding Option Program that was included in SB 855, the recently enacted budget trailer bill. As amended, AB1882 bears a cost estimate of less than \$1 million.

For More Information

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