



## Children's Advocacy Institute

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### CHILDREN'S ADVOCACY INSTITUTE SPONSORS FOSTER CARE LEGISLATION

**Sacramento.** The Children's Advocacy Institute (CAI), a non-partisan academic center and statewide advocacy group based at the University of San Diego School of Law, is sponsoring legislation aimed at improving the lives of children in foster care. Assembly Bill 636 (Steinberg) and Assembly Bill 1330 (Steinberg) bring accountability to the foster care system and provide foster children a family-like home, respectively.

California is responsible for caring for all children placed in foster care - about 130,481 children. Children are placed in foster care when their parents or legal guardians are unable or unwilling to care for them. Each year, there are over 500,000 reported cases of maltreatment and almost 25% of reports are found to be substantiated. Most children are removed from their home due to neglect (77%).<sup>1</sup>

According to CAI Senior Policy Advocate Lupe Alonzo, "California has not been successful at caring for its most vulnerable children - foster children. It is time the state took its parental obligation seriously. The state is not doing a good job of recruiting and retaining foster family homes. Children need to be placed with a licensed foster family, the placement that most resembles a family. If the state continues to treat its most vulnerable children this way, California will be responsible for perpetuating a long-standing travesty; two years after emancipation: 50% have not completed high school, 45% are unemployed, 35% are arrested, 30% do not have access to health care, 25% are homeless, 60% of women have already given birth, and less than 20% are self-supporting."

California will undergo a comprehensive evaluation of its foster care system by the federal government. The first review is in September of 2002 and the second one is in 2007. Failure to comply with prescribed criteria may result in the loss of federal funds.<sup>2</sup>

AB 636 brings accountability by creating the California Child and Family Service Review System to review all county child welfare systems.<sup>3</sup> Currently, there is no formal mechanism to evaluate how the state is caring for foster children. The state needs to evaluate its programs and services to ensure that it is caring for its children in a manner that puts them first. "Right now, we wouldn't get a passing grade," notes Alonzo.

AB 1330 provides a 5% per year rate increase for licensed foster families for the next four years. This rate increase, a phased-in "catch-up COLA," merely gets licensed family home rates back to just under what they would have been with periodic cost-of-living adjustments since 1990 - getting those rates back in line with the actual cost of providing care. With the exception of a 6% increase in 1997-98, there have been no other COLAs to this program since 1990. This increase is absolutely necessary to increase the supply and professionalism of licensed foster families.

Currently, counties are experiencing a severe shortage of licensed foster families, especially important for infants and very young children. Licensed foster families are the placement of choice of child welfare agencies, but counties increasingly must rely on the far more expensive foster family agency and group homes for placement of these children, regardless of their treatment needs, simply because that is where there are available beds.

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"The U.S. Dept of Agriculture estimates that it costs a family \$20 a day to raise a child. It costs over \$20 a day to put a dog in a kennel yet the state pays licensed foster families less than \$14 a day raise its children," states Alonzo.

AB 636 and AB 1330 will be heard in the Assembly Human Services Committee on Tuesday, April 17 at 1:30 p.m. in Room 437.

Notes:

1. For every 1000 California children, there are 38 children touched by the child welfare system.
2. California receives funds for its foster care from Title IV-E of the federal Social Security Act. Penalties may be similar to those paid to the federal government for the state's noncompliance of child support. California is currently fined over \$52 million for non-compliance of child support regulations.
3. The review will evaluate child protective services, foster care, adoption, family preservation, family support and independent living.