



California Gov. Jerry Brown responds to question concerning his revised \$124 billion state budget plan. Child advocates are hoping state lawmakers can spare some change to give foster children improved legal advocacy. **Rich Pedroncelli AP**

## Adults have let these kids down. Now adults in the Legislature need to step up

BY THE SACRAMENTO BEE EDITORIAL BOARD

MAY 25, 2017

Advocates for foster kids are urging that Gov. Jerry Brown and legislators spare \$22 million to provide kids with lawyers. Those doubting the need should consider what has been happening at the Mary Graham Children's Shelter in French Camp outside Stockton.

Mary Graham is one of nine shelters across the state that, last year, housed 5,400 children of deeply troubled parents. Yet as a [San Francisco Chronicle report detailed](#), those homes called the cops 14,000 times in 2015 and 2016. Most were to report runaways. But police made at least 485 arrests at the homes.

At Mary Graham, staffers were supposed to care for 515 children in 2016. They called the San Joaquin County sheriff an average of nine times a day, [The Chronicle found](#). Children from Mary Graham were booked 199 times at the county's juvenile hall in 2015 and 2016.

Supposed crimes at that and other centers included a cake fight, assault with a pack of hot dog buns, and poking a caregiver with a candy cane. One reporter witnessed two sheriff's deputies pinning a 10-year-old girl to the ground and forcing her into handcuffs on Mary Graham's front lawn as children watched from the shelter gate: "The girl, about 5 feet tall and wearing a red hoodie pulled over her braided hair, cried as deputies put her in the back of a patrol car," the story said.

There's a need for children's shelters. Too many parents are drug-addicted, abusive or imprisoned, and good foster parents are hard to find. But no matter how caring social workers at the facilities are, the children also need advocates who can navigate the court system, and help make the best of a difficult situation.

In many counties, a dependency court attorney can represent 300 children or more, an impossible task. The Judicial Council, which oversees California courts, recommends no more than 141 child clients.

The council, along with a handful of lobbyists and the nonprofit Children's Legal Services of San Diego, [wants the \\$22 million](#) to hire enough lawyers to lower the caseload to one for every 188 kids. The expenditure on dependency court attorneys amounts to \$136 million, dust in a \$184 billion budget.

Foster kids are where they are because adults have let them down. The Legislature should at least come through with the basic advocacy they need.

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