[Place on your letterhead]

[INSERT date]

The Honorable Shirley Weber, Chair

Assembly Budget Subcommittee on Health and Human Services

State Capitol, Room 6026

Sacramento, CA 95814

*FAX: 916-319-2199*

**SUPPORT BUDGET REQUEST: Interim Increase in Funding for Social Workers in Foster Family Agencies**

Dear Assembly member Weber:

I am writing in support of increasing funding in the Foster Family Agency (FFA) rate for social workers who provide intensive supports and services to foster children and youth with complex behavioral and emotional needs and to the families who care for them. This investment would require an interim increase of the Social Work component of the FFA rate until completion and implementation of the State’s Continuum of Care Reform effort.

[Insert a short paragraph about your organization.]

According to available state data, the amount built into the foster care rate for a FFA social worker – who is required by law to have a Master’s degree – is lower than the average pay for all other publicly funded social work positions in schools, county child welfare agencies, prisons, the California Department of Social Services, and hospitals, and lower than the amount built into the foster care rate for group homes.

Indeed, the FFA rate includes just $15.13 an hour for social worker wages. Compare this to $30.07 an hour for a California Department of Social Services (CDSS) adoptions social worker, $26.64 an hour for psychiatric social workers in state facilities, and $23.37 an hour for social workers in group homes.

The amount built into the FFA rate for the compensation of social workers has been frozen since 2001 and cut an additional 10% in 2009. This inequity is particularly acute at a time when foster children and youth have greater needs and challenges, county child welfare and probation departments are requiring increasingly more in services from FFAs, and the cost of living has risen nearly 45%.

When the State sets rates that lock in social worker wage levels at unrealistically and unsustainably low levels, there are adverse impacts to our foster children and youth. Recruitment, hiring and retention of qualified social workers become increasingly difficult, with foster children experiencing social worker turnover and resultant disruption of that important relationship, and further impeding the chances for permanency. It is not uncommon, moreover, for FFA social workers to take on second full time jobs, as documented by the *Los Angeles Times*, resulting in social workers who are less able to effectively serve their children.

It is also becoming increasingly more difficult to recruit and retain qualified foster families to care for youth with challenging needs when foster parents cannot count on the support of qualified social workers. Without qualified social work support, fewer families are stepping forward to care for children with significant needs, and the number will continue to decline precipitously.

Foster Family Agencies cannot continue to serve youth at the level needed to achieve the best outcomes without an interim rate reinvestment in their social workers. FFAs have done all they can over the past 13 years simply to stay afloat by freezing social worker salaries; laying off support staff; reducing or eliminating janitorial and maintenance services; reducing staff training; and finally, when all options have been exhausted, closing their main office or satellite offices, all of which results in fewer families serving high need foster youth. Approximately 15,000 or 25% of all foster children live with foster parents who have been recruited and trained by Foster Family Agencies, but each year, fewer FFAs remain open: there has been a 20% decline in the number of FFAs since 2007.

There is hope on the horizon. In the past year, the State has undertaken a legislatively-mandated statewide “Continuum of Care Reform” effort to transform the foster care system and to increase permanency outcomes for youth. Included in CCR will be a redefinition of the roles of FFAs and a new rate system. However, according to State officials, it will take at least two years before this goal is realized.

We are therefore, asking the State to approve an interim solution to re-invest in social worker wages to reflect the CNI to 2001 and bring the social worker wage up from $15.13 an hour to $23.91 per hour. This interim rate increase would sunset when the reforms are enacted. We strongly and sincerely ask for your support for this proposal. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

[INSERT Your Full Name]
[INSERT Your Title (if applicable)]