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June 3, 2024

The Honorable Gavin Newsom
Governor of California
1021 O Street, Suite 9000
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Budget Restorations to CalWORKs, Child Welfare Services, and Adult Protective Services – SUPPORT

Dear Governor Newsom,

I am writing on behalf of the Kern County Board of Supervisors to express our gratitude for the budget restorations provided in the Legislature's budget plan for the human services programs that we administer on the state's behalf. These restorations save the social services safety net, preserving core services and supports that have proven essential to supporting children, families, and older adults in recovering from the Great Recession and during and after the COVID-19 pandemic – and ensuring that those resources continue to be available to support the most vulnerable Californians during these current economically challenging times. We strongly urge you and your Administration to maintain funding for these vital and life-saving services in the final budget agreement.

In particular, we highlight restorations in the following three main areas deemed as especially critical:

CalWORKs – Kern County strongly supports the restoration of funding for the Single Allocation and Family Stabilization, and the partial restorations for Expanded Subsidized Employment, mental health and substance abuse services, and the Home Visiting Program. The cuts as originally proposed reversed well over a decade of investments in the CalWORKs program and the families served by it, eliminating services and supports that are proven to improve family well-being and their economic security. The restorations prevent the decimation of the existing CalWORKs services infrastructure.

With these funding restorations, CalWORKs clients will continue to have subsidized employment opportunities that connect them to crucial job training, skills, and experiences that lead to higher wages and permanent employment; and families experiencing crises or barriers will continue to have access to intensive case management and services (e.g., domestic violence services, behavioral health, education and housing supports) through the Family Stabilization program. Restorations of the deep cuts to the Single Allocation will

allow our county to continue providing supportive services and re-engagement with clients, in addition to our eligibility work, rather than having to make actual reductions to current service and staffing levels.

We are also grateful to see that there are no proposed cuts to CalWORKs grant levels. Cash grants are essential to helping poor families be less poor. But the drastic cuts to CalWORKs services and case management would have undermined the very attributes that make California's TANF program a model for and leader of the rest of the nation. We urge you to maintain funding for these essential services.

Child Welfare Services – Kern County strongly supports restoration of funding for programs serving vulnerable youth and families in the child welfare system. These programs have proven to stabilize youth and families and their elimination would have resulted in increased costs in other systems including housing, criminal justice, health, and behavioral health.

Specifically, we urge the preservation of funding (\$50 million General Fund (GF)) for caregiver approvals. This funding supports state-mandated case management activities to perform timely approval of relative caregivers through the Resource Family Approval process. This proposed cut was contrary to efforts to maintain relative-based placements for foster youth and would have led to even longer approval times for relative caregivers, during which time relatives will be unable to access other foster care benefits to which they would otherwise be entitled, including higher foster care rates through the current home-based foster care rate structure and county specialized care increments. Furthermore, restoration of this funding puts the state budget back in alignment with the Administration's permanent Foster Care Rate Reform proposal, which is intended to invest directly in family-based placements to keep youth connected to their relatives and communities of origin.

We also urge the preservation of funding for the Family Urgent Response System (FURS) (\$30 million GF). FURS currently responds to 5,000 calls from youth and caregivers a year, connecting them to ongoing mental health services, leading to a reduced likelihood of foster children and youth's needs escalating to the point of requiring residential treatment or having a psychiatric emergency. Elimination of FURS would have led to placement disruptions and hospitalizations, causing further trauma to foster youth, and contacts with law enforcement which will lead to criminalization of youth's trauma-based reactions.

Lastly, we strongly support the alternative in the Legislature's budget plan to defer funding for the Bringing Families Home (BFH) Program rather than eliminate it. The BFH Program is proven effective in promoting supportive housing and rapid re-housing for families reunifying with their children and helping to prevent foster care entry by supporting the parents of children who are at risk of abuse and neglect. BFH is an important resource for black and Native American children and families who are disproportionately represented in the child welfare system.

Adult Protective Services – Kern County strongly supports the restoration of funding for the Adult Protective Services (APS) program, which provides 24/7 response to reports of abuse and neglect for individuals over 60 and dependent adults ages 18-59. The program is and will continue to be important as it is projected that by 2030, one in five Californians will be 65 or older. The proposed cut would have resulted in the immediate loss of social worker staff statewide who provide critical and often life-saving response and services to victims of abuse, neglect, and exploitation, leaving older and dependent adults more vulnerable to hospitalization, institutionalization in nursing homes and premature death.

We also urge the preservation of funding (\$4.8 million GF) for APS training. The training is essential in supporting social worker staff to meet the needs of vulnerable older and dependent adults. Elimination of the funding would have jeopardized the uniformity, consistency, and quality in the administration and delivery of the APS program statewide.

Lastly, we strongly support continuation of funding for the Home Safe Program, which provides tangible housing assistance for victims of abuse, neglect and financial exploitation. As the fastest growing segment of the unhoused population, it is more critical now more than ever that we preserve resources to prevent homelessness and help older adults maintain stable and safe housing. We urge you to maintain the state's commitment to vulnerable and older adults.

Concluding Remarks

California is a leader in pushing towards a more equitable and thriving community for all Californians through services and supports provided in CalWORKs, child welfare services, and older adults programs. County human services agencies, the Administration, and the Legislature have invested and worked extremely hard over the past decade to serve our most vulnerable Californians, including families and individuals living in deep poverty, foster youth and their caregivers, and vulnerable and neglected older adults. We recognize that the state is facing significant financial challenges and that difficult choices are needed to address the multi-year budget deficit. However, we urge that the budget is not balanced on the backs of children and families already experiencing deep poverty and that you preserve the restorations of these core services and supports.

For these reasons, the Kern County Board of Supervisors urges you and your Administration to maintain funding for these vital and life-saving services and supports.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'David Couch', with a stylized, cursive script.

David Couch, Chairman
Kern County Board of Supervisors

cc: Richard Figueroa, Office of the Governor
Dr. Mark Ghaly, Health and Human Services Agency
Joe Stephenshaw, Department of Finance
Kim Johnson, California Department of Social Services
Chris Woods, Office of the Senate President Pro Tempore
Jason Sisney, Office of the Speaker of the Assembly
Christian Griffith, Assembly Committee on Budget
Honorable Members, Kern Legislative Delegation
Jenny Nguyen, County Welfare Directors Association (CWDA)
Kern County Department of Human Services
Kern County Aging and Adult Services
Shaw Yoder Antwih Schmelzer & Lange