

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

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March 21, 2024

The Honorable Corey Jackson, Chair
Assembly Budget Subcommittee No. 2
1021 O Street, Room 8230
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Carolie Menjivar, Chair
Senate Budget & Fiscal Review Subcommittee No. 3
1020 N Street, Room 502
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Sharon Quirk-Silva, Chair
Assembly Budget Subcommittee No. 5
Capitol Office, 1021 O Street, Suite 4210
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Stephan Padilla, Chair
Senate Budget & Fiscal Review Subcommittee No. 4
1020 N Street, Room 502
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Child Welfare and Housing Services: OPPOSE Cuts to the Family Urgent Response System, Housing Supplement for Supervised Independent Living Programs, and Housing Navigation and Maintenance Program

Dear Senators Menjivar and Padilla and Assemblymembers Jackson and Quirk-Silva,

I am writing on behalf of the Kern County Board of Supervisors to express our strong opposition to the Governor's proposed cuts to programs and services impacting abused and neglected children and youth served by child welfare programs. The cuts threaten to reverse the positive trends achieved in recent years towards increased stability and permanency for foster children, and homelessness prevention for current and former foster youth.

We are specifically opposed to the following cuts:

Family Urgent Response System (FURS): FURS was created by and for youth currently or formerly in foster care and their caregivers to provide critically needed, immediate, 24/7, individualized, trauma-informed support. Established in 2019 by Senate Bill 80, FURS consists of a statewide hotline and county mobile response systems that respond to any situation where youth or caregivers have identified the need for extra support, including those with the potential to lead to placement disruptions or unnecessary contact with law enforcement. This coordinated state and community-based solution helps preserve relationships and placements in family homes, link youth and families

to longer-term supports and services, promote healing, and prevent the criminalization of youth who have experienced trauma. FURS is also a critical resource to promote stability for older youth (up to age 21) currently or formerly in foster care who are living on their own.

Calls to the state-level hotline and requests for mobile response continue to grow since FURS launched in 2021 and has provided a concrete, supportive resource to foster caregivers and foster youth. There is no other program available to foster caregivers and current and former foster youth that provides the level of concrete and immediate support to preserve placements and strengthen families. We urge the Legislature to protect and retain the \$30 million GF investment into FURS.

Housing for Foster Youth in Supervised Independent Living Placements (SILP) – The Governor’s Budget proposes to cut \$18.8 million GF and halt implementation of the SILP payment housing supplement, which was scheduled to implement in Fiscal Year (FY) 2025-26. This proposal would eliminate housing supplements that could be made available to more than 3,000 non-minor dependents (NMD) in SILPs based on their county of residence. SILPs provide NMDs aged 18-21 with transitional housing support as they participate in work or educational activities under the Extended Foster Care (EFC) Program, allowing them to take important steps in their preparation towards independent living. The current level of the SILP payment—\$1,206 per month—is a flat rate currently set by the State to cover all basic necessities of food, clothing, transportation and shelter. This statewide rate is already woefully inadequate and fails to take into consideration county variations in housing costs. The SILP payment housing supplement, when implemented in FY 2025-26, will provide a critical buffer against homelessness for foster youth as they age out of the foster care system and should be retained in the final budget.

Housing Navigation and Maintenance Program (HNMP): The Governor’s Budget also proposes to eliminate the HNMP (\$13.7 million GF cut) in FY 2024-25 and annually ongoing. The HNMP is administered through the Department of Housing and Community Development with funding allocated to county child welfare agencies to provide housing navigation services to young adults, including current and former foster youth, ages 18 through 24. Assistance includes finding and securing housing, case management, emergency supports, housing loss prevention, and coordination and linkage to resources and services.

The HNMP also allows child welfare agencies, working with their local Continuums of Care housing partners, to leverage federal housing vouchers through the Family Unification Program (FUP) and Foster Youth to Independence (FYI) vouchers. If HNMP is eliminated, it would result in the loss of \$22 million in federal FUP/FYI housing supports for former foster youth statewide, impacting 1,300 former foster youth who would be immediately at risk of homelessness. The HNMP stops the pipeline into homelessness for current and former youth, including for parenting foster youth and urge your support for continued funding of this program.

For these reasons, the Kern County Board of Supervisors strongly urges the Legislature's support for these vital programs. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



David Couch, Chairman
Kern County Board of Supervisors

cc: Members and Staff of the Senate Budget Subcommittee No. 3
 Members and Staff of the Senate Budget Subcommittee No. 4
 Members and Staff of the Assembly Budget Subcommittee No. 2
 Members and Staff of the Assembly Budget Subcommittee No. 5
 Honorable Members, Kern Legislative Delegation
 Missy Talbot, County Welfare Directors Association (CWDA)
 California State Association of Counties
 Kern County Department of Human Services
 Shaw Yoder Antwih Schmelzer & Lange