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May 28, 2025

The Honorable Jesse Gabriel, Chair
Assembly Committee on Budget
1021 O Street, Suite 8230
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Scott Wiener, Chair
Senate Committee on Budget & Fiscal Review
1020 N Street, Room 502
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Dr. Corey Jackson, Chair
Assembly Budget Subcommittee No. 2
1021 O Street, Room 6120
Sacramento, CA 95814

Honorable Dr. Akilah Weber Pierson, Chair
Senate Budget Subcommittee No. 3
1021 O Street, Suite 7310
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: MAY REVISION: MAINTAIN FUNDING FOR CHILD WELFARE PROGRAMS

Dear Chairs Gabriel, Wiener, Jackson, and Weber Pierson,

On behalf of Kern County, we strongly oppose the Governor's proposed permanent cut to the Family Urgent Response System (FURS) included in the May Revision. We respectfully urge the Legislature to reject this reduction, and to consider additional funding to support foster family agencies (FFAs) facing skyrocketing insurance premiums. We also offer our comments on proposed changes to the Emergency Child Care Bridge Program and the Tiered Rate Structure (TRS), both of which raise significant concerns for foster youth and caregivers.

Family Urgent Response System (FURS)

FURS is a vital lifeline for current and former foster youth and their caregivers, offering 24/7, immediate, trauma-informed crisis response through a coordinated statewide hotline and local mobile response teams. These services are designed to preserve family placements, de-escalate crises, prevent unnecessary law enforcement involvement, and promote long-term stability and healing.

Since its launch in 2021, FURS has seen a steady increase in demand. However, implementation challenges—such as pandemic-related disruptions and prior threats of elimination—have hindered its full development. With recent efforts to expand and strengthen FURS now underway, the proposed 40% permanent cut would significantly undermine this progress.

Reducing FURS funding by \$13 million in Fiscal Year 2025-26 and beyond would reverse gains in placement stability, increase the risk of foster youth homelessness, and severely limit our ability to prevent foster care involvement in at-risk families. No other program offers the same level of rapid, in-person support that FURS provides. We therefore urge the Legislature to fully fund FURS and reject the proposed cuts.

Foster Family Insurance Crisis

We also call for urgent legislative action to stabilize foster family agencies, many of which are now at risk of closure due to the loss of their primary insurance provider—previously covering approximately 90% of FFAs. Beginning in September 2024, FFAs have received non-renewal notices, and those with properties that include pools or water features are struggling to secure any coverage at all.

As a result, FFAs are facing dramatically higher premiums with reduced benefits, threatening to displace foster youth and decrease statewide capacity for family-based placements. To mitigate this crisis, we support the California Alliance of Child and Family Services' request for \$31.6 million in General Fund support in FY 2025-26 as a temporary measure until a long-term insurance solution can be implemented.

Additional Concerns

Emergency Child Care Bridge Program: The proposed 46% reduction jeopardizes access to critical childcare services for foster caregivers, especially relative and non-relative extended family members. These caregivers rely on this support to provide stable homes. We urge full funding for this program to maintain placement stability.

Tiered Rate Structure (TRS): The proposed trailer bill to activate TRS implementation in Spring 2027 is premature. Key elements of the system remain undefined, and stakeholders have not been adequately engaged. We therefore urge the Legislature to reject the proposed TRS trigger language at this time.

In summary, the proposed budget reductions and policy changes will have far-reaching negative consequences for foster youth, their caregivers, and the broader child welfare system. The Legislature must maintain critical investments in prevention, support, and stability by:

- Rejecting the \$13 million permanent cut to FURS.
- Approving \$31.6 million to stabilize FFAs.
- Restoring full funding to the Emergency Child Care Bridge Program.
- Rejecting the premature TRS implementation proposal.

For these reasons, we urge you to stand with Kern and counties across California in protecting the essential services our most vulnerable children and families rely on. The decisions made in this budget will echo far into the future. Please choose stability, safety, and support over cuts that will cause lasting harm.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'LP' or similar initials, written in a cursive style.

Leticia Perez, Chair
Kern County Board of Supervisors

cc: Honorable Members, Senate Budget Subcommittee No. 3
 Honorable Members, Assembly Budget Subcommittee No. 2
 Staff of Senate Committee on Budget & Fiscal Review
 Staff of Assembly Committee on Budget
 County Welfare Directors Association (CWDA)
 California State Association of Counties (CSAC)
 Shaw Yoder Antwih Schmelzer & Lange