

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

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August 5, 2026

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

The Honorable John Laird, Chair
Senate Committee on Budget & Fiscal Review
1021 O Street, Suite 8720
Sacramento, CA 95814

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

The Honorable Caroline Menjivar, Chair
Senate Budget Subcommittee No. 3
1021 O Street, Suite 6630
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Urgent Request to Delay CWS-CARES Launch and Strengthen Accountability Measures

Dear Chairs Gabriel, Laird, Jackson, and Menjivar,

I am writing on behalf of the Kern County Board of Supervisors to respectfully urge the Legislature to delay the planned October 26, 2026 launch of the Child Welfare Services–California Automated Response and Engagement System (CWS-CARES) by six to eight months and adopt the Trailer Bill Language (TBL) and Budget Bill Language (BBL) proposed by the County Welfare Directors Association (CWDA) to ensure essential accountability and oversight.

Counties cannot safely implement CWS-CARES on the current timeline. With less than three months until go-live, the system remains incomplete, critical functionality is still in development, persistent testing gaps plague implementation, and ongoing county readiness activities still need to be completed. Frontline workers participating in Production Simulation continue to identify significant defects, unresolved issues previously raised during Extended User System Testing, and note missing or malfunctioning core features required for daily child welfare practice.

Launching an unfinished system puts children at risk. System failures, data gaps, and workflow breakdowns could lead to uninvestigated abuse or neglect, unnecessary removals, placement instability, compromised worker safety, and even child fatalities. Counties also lack the time and resources needed to train staff effectively; training materials remain incomplete, access issues persist, and in-person schedules are uncertain. Even if those processes were in place, staff cannot be trained on functionality that is still under development, making safe implementation at this stage impossible.

These risks fall directly on county child welfare agencies, social workers, and the vulnerable children we serve. A delay, paired with clear, enforceable readiness milestones, is the only responsible path forward. CWDA estimates that a six- to eight-month extension would require \$100 million to \$180.7 million in State General Fund depending on federal match availability. This investment is modest compared to the catastrophic consequences of launching an unsafe system.

In summary, moving ahead as planned would endanger foster children, overwhelm frontline workers, and shift unacceptable liability onto counties. As a result, we respectfully urge you to adopt CWDA's critical TBL and BBL actions to protect California's most vulnerable children and families.

Sincerely,



Phillip Peters, Chairman
Kern County Board of Supervisors

cc: Honorable Members, Senate Budget Subcommittee No. 3
Honorable Members, Assembly Budget Subcommittee No. 2
Honorable Members, Kern Legislative Delegation
Staff, Senate Committee on Budget & Fiscal Review
Staff, Assembly Committee on Budget
County Welfare Directors Association (CWDA)
California State Association of Counties (CSAC)
Kern County Department of Human Services
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