



**LOS ANGELES COUNTY COMMISSION
FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES**
Celebrating 36 Years of Advocacy & Achievement

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June 1, 2020

TO: Supervisor Kathryn Barger, Chair
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FROM: Dr. Wendy B. Smith, Chair 
Los Angeles County Commission for Children and Families

SUBJECT: ADVOCATING FOR THE CONTINUATION OF FUNDING FOR VITAL SERVICES AND SUPPORTS FOR VULNERABLE CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE

The Commission for Children and Families (Commission) respectfully urges the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors (Board) to submit a five-signature letter to Governor Gavin Newsom (Governor) and the California Legislature (Legislature) advocating for the continuation of funding for vital services and supports for vulnerable children in foster care.

The Governor's May Revision is sobering. It reflects the severity of the economic crisis ushered in by the novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) and the difficult decisions required to mitigate the effects of the pandemic. The Governor's revised budget identifies public health, public safety, and public education as the three priorities that must be protected even in the face of devastating cuts, but falls short of ensuring critical protections for children in foster care. The May Revision proposes cuts that target vital supports and services that resource families rely on to meet the needs of children in their care.

The Commission urges the Board to leverage its tremendous leadership capacity to promote policy that will (1.) ensure that relative caregivers have ongoing access to emergency caregiver funding while children are placed in their care; (2.) maintain existing level of care rates; and, (3.) adequately fund stabilizing services and supports, including those for children with complex needs.

Specifically, we urge your advocacy of the following:

1. Ensuring Emergency Caregiver Funding is Available to Families Pending Resource Family Approval (RFA)

Effective July 1, 2020, emergency caregiver funding to relatives and non-relative extended family members awaiting RFA approval will be limited to 90 days, with “no good cause” to extend this funding - regardless of the reason for the delay in completion of the RFA process. Current policy allows emergency caregiver funding to be paid for up to 365 days upon demonstration of “good cause” that the delay in approval is due to circumstances beyond the direct control of the county. The COVID-19 pandemic is projected to cause a backlog of families in the approval process; this change in legislation increases the strain on children and caregivers who are already struggling with the economic impacts of the crisis. To ensure adequate support for these families, the emergency caregiver funding program must continue to provide funding for up to 365 days upon a showing of “good cause” for the delay in finalizing RFA approval.

2. Ensuring Sufficient Support for Resource Families Impacted by COVID-19

Maintain Foster Care Level of Care Rates

The May Revision proposes suspension of Foster Care Level of Care Rates two (2) through four (4). It is counterintuitive to cut funding to resource families just when unemployment and loss of income rates in the state have skyrocketed. A recent survey of Los Angeles County resource families, including relative caregivers, found economic hardship as the topmost concern, as most reported experiencing loss of income due to COVID-19. Further, resource families are now called upon to do more than ever as a result of school and child care closures, suspensions of in-person visitation, and reductions in provision of many of the therapeutic services families rely on to address trauma and stabilize children. The loss of this funding may jeopardize resource families’ ability to meet the needs of the children in their care. The state must maintain existing foster care level of care rates.

Extend and Expand Temporary Payments Authorized by Executive Order N-53-20

In an effort to meet some of the above-described needs, the Governor permitted the establishment of temporary payment amounts to support families impacted by COVID-19, not to exceed the amount of the Intensive Services Foster Care Rate. However, this rate flexibility will expire on June 30, 2020. The state should extend and expand the temporary payments to ensure that all families impacted by COVID-19 can benefit from the additional support.

Our Mission

The Commission for Children and Families advises the Board of Supervisors on strengthening service delivery systems and enhancing partnerships to create safer and more secure futures for Los Angeles County's at-risk children and their families.

Extend Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer (P-EBT)

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, children who are eligible for free or reduced-price school meals, including foster youth, will receive extra one-time benefits to help caregivers meet their nutritional needs while schools are closed through the P-EBT program. The state should extend the P-EBT program or ensure the equivalent level of funding to qualifying children to counter food insecurity during the summer months of June, July, and August.

3. Restoration of the Family Urgent Response System.

The May Revision proposes elimination of the Family Urgent Response System (FURS), which is in the process of being developed and implemented statewide. The FURS will enable stressed resource families to cope with extremely challenging and urgent situations by providing trained professionals who can stabilize a child and family in a moment of crisis. Children and resource families in crisis must have access to immediate stabilizing services during critical moments.

This is a time when resource families are facing personal hardships in the face of COVID-19. Failure to provide support at this critical time will exacerbate the existing resource family shortage in Los Angeles County, leaving us with an insufficient number of loving and caring homes for the vulnerable children that we must protect. Our safety net is stretched to its thinnest; we must take action now to protect and ensure the well-being of the most vulnerable among us. The Commission's policy recommendations are consistent with the Board's priorities and the overarching vision for child welfare services in Los Angeles County. For these reasons, the Commission respectfully urges the Board to advocate for continuation of the vital services and supports necessary to ensure the health, safety, and well-being of children in foster care.

4. Services and Support for Non-minor Dependents

Young adults ages 18-21 who have aged out of California's foster care system are among the most vulnerable citizens in our state and are particularly at risk of homelessness and many more dire outcomes. This Commission further encourages the Board to advocate for the State of California to fully fund AB12 to allow continued, uninterrupted services and support to these young adults.

You may contact me at wsmith@usc.edu or the Commission's Executive Director, Dr. Tamara N. Hunter at huntet@dcs.lacounty.gov with any questions.

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Each Supervisor

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c: Executive Officer, Board of Supervisors
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County Counsel
Interim Chief Probation Officer, Probation Department
Director, Department of Children and Family Services
Director, Department of Mental Health
Executive Director, Office of Child Protection
Children's Deputies
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