



May 11, 2023

The Honorable Anthony Portantino
Chair, Senate Appropriations Committee
1021 O Street, Room 7630
Sacramento, California 95814

**Re: SB 408 (Ashby): Child Welfare Services for Foster Youth with Complex Needs
As Amended May 3, 2023 – SUPPORT**

Dear Senator Portantino:

On behalf of the California State Association of Counties (CSAC), the Urban Counties of California (UCC) and the Rural County Representatives of California (RCRC), we write in support of SB 408 (to establish programs and services to support foster youth and youth at risk of foster care with significant trauma and complex needs. This investment is needed to ensure no youth are left behind in California's continuing effort to implement Continuum of Care Reform (CCR).

Counties have embraced the goals of the Continuum of Care Reform (CCR), implemented through AB 403 (Stone, Ch. 773, Statutes of 2015), to reduce the use of congregate care and improve permanency and other outcomes for foster youth. CCR has resulted in profound shifts in child welfare practices and has helped to improve outcomes for many – but not all - children, youth and families. Improvements in practices include the use of child and family teaming to ensure youth and family voice in case management and placement decisions, statewide use of the Resource Family Approval process to align and streamline licensing and approval for families, increases in foster care rates, and use of a universal child strengths and needs assessment tool. CCR resulted in significant reductions in the use of congregate care and a greater focus on supporting children and youth in family-based settings.

However, CCR was not designed to serve some of our foster youth who have experienced severe trauma and/or have complex physical, behavioral, and other needs. County child welfare agencies collaborate diligently with their system partners – mental health plans, care providers, regional centers, educational agencies, etc., – to care for youth with severe trauma and/or complex care needs, but challenges remain. Higher-level treatment services are not always available at the moment they are needed, and providers are not always able to offer the intensive care needed by some youth. As a result, these youth often experience multiple placement disruptions and hospitalizations, and sometimes stay in unlicensed settings, while social workers seek other appropriate services and treatment settings. Unfortunately, this further exacerbates a youth's trauma and is likely to lead to poor outcomes.

SB 408 would establish up to ten regional health teams across the state to improve assessments and timely access to needed services (physical, mental health, substance use, etc.), perform comprehensive case management in coordination with other child-serving systems, and ensure appropriate follow-up to prevent placement disruptions with families and care coordination for youth stepping down from

hospitals or other settings. This approach is critical to preserving families, preventing disruptions in family-based foster care, and identifying and supporting families as early as possible to reduce trauma.

SB 408 would also require the department to develop an enhanced funding model for short-term residential therapeutic programs serving up to four current or former foster youth with complex needs. This funding would be conditional on requirements that the program accept all children and NMD's referred by the Child Welfare Agency, that the program serves children until they can be appropriately transitioned, and that the program hold beds open if a child is temporarily transferred to a hospital or crisis mental health in-patient care setting for a period of 14 days.

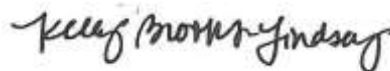
Finally, this bill would convert one-time funds provided to counties into an on-going appropriation of funding from the State Department of Social Services to build and sustain complex care programs and practices. The bill's funding provisions will allow counties to more immediately and effectively serve children, youth, and families with complex needs.

SB 408 will help county child welfare agencies preserve families and improve services to our youth with significant trauma and/or complex needs. For the above reasons, CSAC, UCC and RCRC are in support of this measure.

Sincerely,



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cc: The Honorable Angelique Ashby, Member, California State Senate
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