



Impact of the May Revision on the Child Welfare System

While the current pandemic is forcing policymakers to make difficult choices, the State budget is a definitive statement of our values. We must protect the children and youth who are the state's responsibility and prevent additional harm or re-traumatization. The following reflect the child welfare community's leading concerns related to the May Revision.

Family Urgent Response System (FURS)

Current and former foster youth and their caregivers need immediate access to trauma-informed support during critical moments. The proposed elimination of FURS would be devastating and must be rejected. Implementation of FURS, a 24/7 statewide hotline and county mobile response teams, is currently underway and vital to helping foster youth and families cope with the severe stress brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Emergency Caregiver Funding

The COVID-19 pandemic is increasing timelines for resource family approval just as funding for emergency placements becomes time limited to 90 days, leaving families who are already struggling with job losses and other impacts of COVID-19 with few resources to care for the children the state has placed in their homes. The state must continue Emergency Caregiver Funding for up to 365 days to ensure children and youth in emergency placements are provided with resources while Resource Family Approval is pending.

Resource Family Rate Flexibility

The May Revision proposes suspension of level of care rates 2 – 4 despite the fact that during the pandemic resource families are being called upon to do more than ever as a result of school and child care closures and limited access to services and supports. We must ensure that resource families are provided with sufficient support by extending and expanding the temporary payments authorized through Executive Order N-53-20 and/or expanding P-EBT benefits through the summer months.

Dependency Attorneys

Dependency counsel provide legal representation for children and parents involved in the foster care system. With limited access to the courts, a growing backlog of cases, and an expected increase to the foster care population as families face unprecedented challenges, the statutory obligation to ensure that children in foster care and their parents receive the highest level of advocacy is needed now more than ever. Additional funding cuts would undermine the constitutional right to counsel and jeopardize the state's promise to children and families most in need of our help.

Foster Family Agency (FFA) Social Worker Stability

FFA social workers support a third of all foster children in family homes and 100% of all foster children in Intensive Services Foster Care. Studies show that stability in social workers dramatically increases permanency. Sadly, FFAs face a 59% turnover rate in their social workers. The state should support our children and youth in foster care by rejecting the elimination of the one-time cost of living adjustment that was provided last year to help stabilize FFA social workers.

Public Health Nurse Early Intervention Program

This program will connect kids and families with important public health supports and services designed to keep kids out of the dependency system and at home with their families. It's particularly important during COVID-19, when young families face even great stressors, to have public health nurses working with children in the most vulnerable homes. The proposed elimination of this program, along with a proposed cut of almost \$30 million to home visitation programs across the state, will be devastating to young children at risk.

Housing Supports

The May Revision proposes the elimination of the Housing Navigator program which will assist youth, including current and former foster youth, to find housing. This program is desperately needed as rental markets and housing programs are stretched thin due to COVID-19 and the resulting recession. The May Revision invests \$750 million to address homelessness but fails to include a set-aside to ensure 10% of those funds are used to address the needs of homeless youth, many of whom are former foster youth.

Short-Term Residential Treatment Programs

STRTPs support 100% of foster youth whose mental and behavioral health needs necessitate the highest level of trauma-informed care and are often the last placement options before the youth is hospitalized. These needs cannot be met in a family home. Placement availability and placement stability are paramount and will be undermined by the proposed rate reduction.

Educational Supports

May Revision cuts to K-12 and Higher Education could exacerbate inequities that current and former foster youth face. Critical components of our education system, like LCFF and the CAFYES program, were designed to increase resources for and support current and former foster youth in K-12 settings and on community college campuses. These students cannot sustain a cut at a time when learning loss and lack of access to technology have already compounded their barriers to education. We encourage the state to reject cuts to foster youth-focused educational supports to prevent additional inequities.

Foster Youth Bill of Rights

The Foster Youth Bill of Rights ensures that children and youth in foster care are treated fairly and that their personal rights are respected. Funding is necessary to ensure the rights of foster children are upheld, accessible and that outreach and training on these rights continues. The state should retain the funding necessary to educate and inform children and youth in foster care of their rights.

Youth Reinvestment Fund and Tribal Diversion Fund

These funds were intended to equip organizations, agencies, and tribes throughout the state with the funding needed to improve youth outcomes using trauma-informed, community-based, and health-based interventions. Effective diversion with community-based services is a far more cost-effective approach to creating supports for youth who come into contact with law enforcement and helps prevent the crossover of foster youth into the juvenile justice system which is not designed to meet their needs.

Children and youth in foster care face a number of devastating cuts in the current budget that will cause long-lasting harm, compound the trauma they have already experienced and devastate the safety net designed to support them.