



California Alliance
OF CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES

FACT SHEET

Support to Children and Families Provided by Foster Family Agency Social Workers

The Situation

California's *Child Welfare Continuum of Care Reform (CCR)* report released in February by the Department of Social Services (CDSS) outlines the State's vision "to improve the experience and outcomes of children and youth in foster care" and to reduce the placements of foster youth in group homes. Indeed, the report recommends closing all RCL 1-9 group homes and transitioning those youth to home-based family care settings.

CCR would accomplish its goal of "emphasizing family-based placements *by providing appropriate services and supports.*" FFAs are key to the success of this endeavor.

Over 25% of children in California foster care currently live with FFA certified families. More children are placed with FFAs than in any other non-relative foster care setting. Children, youth, their foster caregivers, birth parents, brothers and sisters, and extended family members rely on FFA social workers for essential supports and services that help assure safety, provide placement stability, maintain family connections, sustain permanency, and support reunification efforts.

"To increase the capacity of family-based placements to care for children formerly in group home placements..., FFAs would be required to provide a more extensive set of core services to the foster families they certify. Additionally, counties would be able to contract with FFAs to provide the same services to other foster families, including county-licensed FFHs and kin caregivers."

*LAO comments on CCR Report,
February 2015*

"...one major challenge to reducing reliance on group home placements is having an adequate supply of family-based placements, particularly those capable of caring for children whose elevated needs make them at risk for group home placement..."

*LAO comments on CCR Report,
February 2015*

To date, only FFA certified foster families and the children and youth they care for have had access to the services and support provided by FFA social workers. CCR would expand the availability of such services and support to all foster caregivers, including kin, non-related extended family members, and county licensed foster families.

California, like the rest of the country is experiencing a critical shortage of foster caregivers. A March 1, 2015 *Los Angeles Times* article states, the "demand for foster beds exceeds supply by more than 30% nationally. ***Forty percent of foster parents withdraw during their first year, and an additional 20% say they want out, national studies show.***"

Supporting home-based family care is critical to retaining foster families, assuring kin have the skills and back-up they need, and to improving the experience and outcomes

of children and youth in foster care. Achieving that goal simply is not possible without a robust FFA social work capacity.

The Problem

FFA social work services have reached a crisis point. The amount built into the current FFA rate for social work services has been frozen since 2001 and was cut an additional 10% in 2009 leaving an astounding 64% shortfall. The rate now supports an hourly wage of just \$15.13/hour for a MSW

level social worker, with minimal funding for benefits such as healthcare insurance. So severe is the situation that the *Los Angeles Times* reports that FFA social workers often take second full time jobs.

FFA social workers are required by law to have a Master's degree, yet the amount in the rate for their compensation is lower than the average pay for all other publicly funded social work positions in schools, county child welfare agencies, prisons, the California Department of Social Services, and hospitals, and lower than the amount built into the foster care rate for group homes. Compare the \$15.13/hour in the FFA rate to \$30.66 an hour for a California Department of Social Services (CDSS) adoptions social worker, \$26.64 an hour for psychiatric technicians in state facilities, and \$23.38 an hour for social workers in group homes.

This inequity has led to a crisis for FFAs in the recruitment, hiring and retention of qualified social workers. Many social work professionals simply cannot afford to work for FFAs, despite their personal commitment to the children, youth and families they serve. Moreover, there has been a precipitous 25% decline in the number of licensed FFAs since 2007, with FFAs often citing the challenges of recruiting and retaining qualified staff as a primary reason for closure.

The Solution

The Legislature should allocate \$18.9 million GF to increase Social Work component of the FFA rate by \$200/month, thereby raising the funded hourly wage for a Foster Family Agency social worker to \$24.47. By increasing just the Social Work component of the rate, the Legislature would ensure that FFAs must use all the funds for social work services and may not use them for any other purpose.

Of only two items in the Governor's January proposed budget are aimed at kick starting CCR implementation, one is \$4.2 million GF to "bolster the social worker capacity of Foster Family Agencies to provide services in home-based family care placements."

While a step in the right direction, the budget proposal unfortunately represents an increase of just \$2.27 per hour from \$15.13 (current) to \$17.40, to fund a \$36,192 annual salary for a Master's degree level professional. This amount simply is not sufficient to stabilize the current FFA social worker force much less increase its capacity to implement CCR's stated goals of improving the experience and outcomes of children and youth in foster care and decreasing group home placements.

Support

A broad-based coalition of advocacy groups supports this budget proposal, including the *Alameda County Foster Youth Alliance; *Alliance for Children's Rights; *Association of Community Human Services Agencies (ACHSA); *California Alliance of Child and Family Services; *California Coalition for Youth (CCY); *California Youth Connection (CYC); *ChildrenNow; *County Welfare Directors Association (CWDA); *John Burton Foundation; *National Association of Social Workers (NASW) California Chapter; *Orange County Alliance for Children and Families; and *Public Counsel.

For More Information:

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"We think the focus of the CCR budget proposal on beginning CCR implementation with increasing capacity in family-based settings makes sense.... Given past reductions in the FFA rate, increasing FFA rates to a level that is adequate to meet current expectations until higher expectations are put in place as part of broader CCR implementation may have merit."

LAO comments on CCR Report, February 2015