



Karen Bass

Assembly Member • 47th Assembly District

NewsRelease

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Assembly Member Karen Bass and Members of Select Committee on Foster Care Unveils Legislative Package

Proposed Bills to Deal with Emancipation, Health Care, Education, Court and Social Worker Issues

SACRAMENTO – Assembly Member Karen Bass (D-Los Angeles), Chair of the Select Committee on Foster Care, was today joined by a bipartisan delegation of Assembly Members and foster care advocates in unveiling a comprehensive legislative package designed to improve California's foster care system.

“Nearly 100,000 foster children are the responsibility of the State of California,” Assembly Member Bass said. “And although improvements have been made, we need to continue with changes to ensure these children receive the resources they need. The legislation that we introduce today represents the first step towards a long-term commitment to make significant improvements to the quality of life for foster youth.”

Said Assembly Speaker Fabian Núñez (D-Los Angeles): “The bottom line is that too many children that go through our foster care system end up homeless or in jail. Not only do we have a moral responsibility to these children, but we have a financial stake as well. I'd like to commend Assembly Member Bass for her leadership in bringing forth a comprehensive, bipartisan effort to improve California's foster care system.”

The assembled delegation of legislators and advocates put forward legislation dealing with the following subject matters:

EMANCIPATION:

- Eliminate County Share of Cost for Transitional Housing Program (THP) and THP+;
- Expand existing hiring preferences to include foster youth, such as the Veteran's Preference and Enterprise Zone hiring credits;
- Make Independent Living Programs (ILP) mandatory for all foster youth;
- Allow foster youth to stay in their placement voluntarily until age 21, as long as they participate in ILP and enrolled in furthering their education (i.e. vocational, community colleges, state and UCs); and
- Extend Foster Care Services voluntarily to youth from age 18 to 24.

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HEALTH ISSUES:

- Annual dental and medical exams for all foster youth and Automatic Medi-Cal for Kin-Gap, CalWORKs, and early emancipating youth.

EDUCATION:

- Expand Foster Youth Services to all foster youth and former foster youth in Family Maintenance, Tuition/Fee Waivers at UC and CSU, Automatic CalGrant Eligibility State Complement to the federal Chaffee Grant program, State to “Front” Chafee grants until federal funds are received to allow earlier distribution of grants, Housing Preferences and Year Round Housing, State Incentives for to expand Guardian Scholars-like programs.

RELATIVE/ KINSHIP ISSUES:

- Family Finding Program;
- Independent Living Programs (ILP): Require notification of ILP eligibility to a Kin-GAP family when a child reaches 16 years of age;
- Ensure parity of services between the Kinship Guardianship Assistance Program (Kin-GAP) and foster care: provide Kin-GAP families (relatives who assume permanent guardianship of the children in their care) equal support to foster care including children with specialized needs and access to clothing allowance for youth in the Kin-GAP program;
- Informational pamphlet: create a pamphlet that informs relative caregivers of the services and programs available and allow access to the information via the internet;
- Access to Kin-GAP services for children under the supervision of the probation department;
- Caregiver Bill of Rights;
- Expand the Kinship Supported Services Program and eliminate the requirement for participating counties to have 40% or more of dependent children in relative placement to be eligible to apply for a grant; and
- Maintaining Sibling Connections - Development of a Sibling Registry.

SOCIAL WORKER WORKLOAD ISSUES:

- Phase in Implementation of the SB 2030 workload standards over a designated time period, prioritizing highest need program areas like Permanent Placement program first.

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COURT ISSUES:

- Require release of information on fatalities and near-fatalities in foster care; and
- Require that children in dependency court be appointed appellate counsel, establish a presumption that a child over the age of 12 is of sufficient maturity to invoke client-psychotherapist/clergy/physician privilege.

STATE OVERSIGHT ISSUES:

- Improve independence, capacity, and child-focus of the Ombudsperson, expand State Role in Improving AB 636 outcomes, create a Child Welfare Council and Undersecretary of Foster Care.

CAREGIVER SUPPORT ISSUES:

- Re-institute annual Community Care licensing visits;
- Establish workgroup to review all licensing statutes, regulations, and policies to make them more child focused and appropriate;
- Streamlining the Licensing and Approval Process and Oversight for Caregivers; and
- Recruitment, Retention & Support for Foster Caregivers and Adoptive Families.

On November 9, 2005, Assembly Member Bass announced the formation of the Select Committee on Foster Care. The most recent Committee hearing was held on February 15 to focus on foster youth in relative care.

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