

# Ensuring Child Care Assistance for Foster Families Through Increased Access to Emergency Child Care Bridge Program at Time of Placement

## SUMMARY

Children who are in the child welfare system and experience multiple moves are at increased risk for poor outcomes in academic achievement, socio-emotional health, developing insecure attachments, and distress due to the instability and uncertainty that comes with not having a stable family environment. Placement stability is enhanced when families have access to high quality child care at the time of placement.

One of the primary barriers for potential families seeking to take in a foster child is the lack of access to child care. Resource families, particularly relative caregivers, often take in children with little advance notice or planning. While children in foster care are often eligible for California's subsidized child care system, it can take months to get into those programs and navigating them can be overwhelming to foster caregivers.

On January 1, 2018, California established the Emergency Child Care Bridge program (SB 89) (Bridge program) to increase the number of foster children placed in family settings, promote placement stability and support the child care needs of eligible families. Families may receive time-limited (6 to 12 months) vouchers or payments to pay for child care while they are at work, school or completing additional activities such as training, approval requirements and judicial reviews.

Currently, only \$21 million is allocated to child care vouchers through the bridge program. The Lifting Children and Families Out of Poverty Task Force, which included expansion of the Bridge program as part of their recommendations to end child poverty, estimates that about \$85 million is needed annually to ensure that every foster family who needs child care support receives it. Increasing

access to child care will enable a larger pool of families to become foster parents and help ensure stable homes for more children in need.

## ISSUE

Bridge program funds are limited and do not meet the needs of every eligible foster child and family.

Caregivers who work or are in school cannot take in a child without significantly disrupting their lives or putting their family in financial jeopardy. The lack of access to child care at the time of placement keeps kids out of home-based family care settings and is detrimental to placement stability of those in family placements.

Children are experiencing instability in placements and delays in being connected with caregivers, including relatives and family members, because the families that want to care for them work outside their homes and cannot afford child care.

## PROPOSAL

This budget proposal will expand the Bridge program to ensure that vouchers are available to help caregivers access child care immediately upon placement of a child in their home and that all foster children can access ongoing child care to ensure stability in their placement.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

Susanna Kniffen, Senior Director,  
Child Welfare Policy  
Children Now  
(916) 379-5256 ext. 124  
skniffen@childrennow.org