

February 1, 2019

The Honorable Holly Mitchell, Chair
Senate Budget & Fiscal Review Committee
State Capitol, Room 5050
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Phil Ting, Chair
Assembly Budget Committee
State Capitol, Room 6026
Sacramento, CA 95814

**RE: Increase Funding for the Emergency Child Care Bridge Program for Foster Children
- SUPPORT**

Dear Senator Mitchell and Assembly Member Ting:

The organizations below respectfully request your support for an augmentation to the Emergency Child Care Bridge Program for Foster Children (Bridge Program). Our broad coalition seeks a \$47 million State General Fund (SGF) budget increase to ensure additional access to early care and education services for abused and neglected children across the State. This program helps to immediately stabilize traumatized children in the most appropriate foster care placement, and provides them with a bridge to long-term, high-quality early education programs to promote their educational success.

County child welfare agencies rely on the commitment of resource families to provide safe and loving homes for children who have been abused and neglected. Unfortunately, many willing resource parents cannot provide homes for foster children because they lack access to child care. Although foster children are eligible for state child care subsidies, one of the main barriers to accessing child care is a “timing gap.” When children are removed, they are in crisis and prospective resource parents – often relatives – instantly need to access child care in order to care for their new family member and keep their jobs. Yet, state-subsidized child care programs typically operate at full capacity, with short enrollment windows that rarely align with a child’s placement into foster care. This makes it nearly impossible for caregivers who work to take in young children. The Emergency Child Care Bridge was designed to address this “timing gap” so that children can be promptly placed and stabilized with loving relatives or with the right resource family.

We greatly appreciate the Legislature and Administration’s initial investment of \$31 million state funds for the Bridge Program. As a result, California has been able to leverage additional federal Title IV-E funding to match the State’s investment. This budget proposal seeks an additional \$47 million SGF for the many foster children and resource families who have been unable to access this important support. The proposal includes:

- \$38 million to expand the amount of funding available to counties to be able to provide additional vouchers to children in care,
- \$5 million to support additional navigators who are working to find child care for foster children, and,
- \$4 million to deliver additional trauma-informed training for child care providers as they care for foster children in their local early childhood programs.

Our broad coalition also supports eliminating the statutory hard stop of six months (or twelve months, when funding permits) for children to receive the voucher, as each child and county have varying needs and program availability. By infusing additional resources into the Bridge

Program, local agencies can quickly serve more foster children and remain up-to-date with the changes to the regional market rates. The Bridge Program supports the success of the Continuum of Care Reform (CCR) and the child welfare system in its mission to provide loving foster homes for our most vulnerable children. Counties continue to need additional resource parents to provide loving care for foster children, and access to child care is a key strategy in recruiting and retaining resource families who can help mitigate the impacts of trauma on children's lives. The benefits of high-quality child care for young children can make a significant impact on their social, emotional and academic development, especially for children who have suffered abuse, neglect and exploitation and other adverse childhood experiences.

We believe that expanding this program is critically important and we strongly support this budget request. We are looking forward to working with you and urge you to adopt this investment.

Sincerely,
Alliance for Children's Rights
California Alternative Payment Program
Association
Child Care Resource Center

Children Now
County Welfare Directors Association of
California



cc: Members and Staff of the Senate Budget & Fiscal Review Committee
Members and Staff of the Assembly Budget Committee
Kim Johnson, Deputy Director, Family Engagement & Empowerment Division, California
Department of Social Services