



The California Alliance of Children and Family Services

2024 Public Policy Priorities



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Champion. Partner. Advocate. —

**The California Alliance:
The collective voice for organizations that
serve children, youth, and families.**

The California Alliance of Child and Family Services is the unifying force in the charge to lead change and provide support for the state's children, youth, and families. For those dedicated to improving the lives of children and families served in our public systems, the California Alliance stands apart as the champion and leading voice for organizations that advocate for children and families, and for advancing policy and services on their behalf.

California Alliance of Child and Family Services

2024 Public Policy Platform

The California Alliance of Child and Family Services (California Alliance) is the unifying force leading change and providing support for the state's marginalized and vulnerable children, youth, and families, which are disproportionately individuals and families of color, LGBTQ+, and those with disabilities. With over 160 member organizations, our vision is for all children and families to thrive in safe, loving, and healthy communities. Committed to advancing racial and gender equity, we work to eliminate disparities in child- and family-serving systems across our policy platform.

The Alliance's public policy platform is rooted in the daily work of our members, who advocate tirelessly for systems change for children, youth and families in California. To achieve this vision, the Alliance is dedicated to advocacy in several areas, including:

Behavioral Health

- **Reform school discipline policies, ensuring youth are supported and not punished for substance use**
- Sustain full and equitable access to behavioral healthcare for children, youth, and families (mental health and substance use services) in public behavioral health systems, private insurers, and managed care organizations
- Advocate for adequate, sustainable rates through CalAIM payment reform

Residential Capacity and Support

- **Advocate for sustainable Continuum of Care Reform (CCR) permanent rates to support foster youth and providers that serve them**
- Advocate for original vision of CCR
- Advocate for expansion of community-based supports for families
- Advocate for more resources for adoptive placements and families, and the providers that serve them

Workforce

- **Advocate to reduce background check barriers for prospective employees coming from out-of-state to work in residential programs**
- Advocate for maintaining and expanding the workforce in child-serving systems
- Support efforts on creating a more racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse workforce

Juvenile Justice

- Reduce employment barriers for justice-involved youth
- Support restorative justice, rehabilitative practices, and preventive services that elevate the needs of youth involved in the juvenile justice system so they are appropriately served

Family-Based Services

- **Advocate to restore funding to the California Family Urgent Response System (FURS)**
- **Advocate to prevent Foster Family Agency rate cuts**
- **Protect LGBTQ+ youth with identity-affirming resource families**
- Integrate family finding and engagement in all counties

Education

- Aid in implementation efforts to prioritize **access to foster and homeless students in expanded learning program enrollment**
- Expand access to school-based mental health services, especially for foster and probation youth and students in special education
- Guarantee children and youth have access to educational resources needed to be college/career ready

Transition Age Youth

- **Advocate for gender flexibility in Transitional Housing Programs** to ensure that LGBTQ+ youth, siblings, specialized populations, and parenting and co-parenting youth have opportunities for adequate and safe housing supports
- **Advocate to restore funding to the Supervised Independent Living Placement (SILP) Supplement**
- Uphold safe and stable housing for transition age youth and families, especially for TAY with higher needs that need a step-down from an STRTP

Prevention

- Support the efforts of the Mandated Reporter to Community Supporter Task Force (MRCS)
- Fulfill the Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA)
- Promote Wraparound as a high-quality prevention and early intervention program

Click [HERE](#) to view our policy platform in its entirety.

Bolded items are areas in which the Alliance will sponsor legislation or budget requests. Please reach out to Adrienne Shilton, Vice President of Public Policy and Strategy at ashilton@cacfs.org with any questions.

AB 2544 (Low)

 Sponsored by CA Alliance

- AB 2544 allows prospective employees of Community Care Licensing (CCL) Children’s Residential Programs who are awaiting an out-of-state child abuse check (OCSA) to be hired prior to completion of the background check, as long as they do not have unsupervised contact with kids until they are cleared. Any program employee who has lived out of state within the past 5 years must obtain an OCSA check.
- The prospective employee must already be cleared by the Department of Justice (DOJ), Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), and the California Child Abuse Central Index (CACI) Check through Guardian, California’s background check system.
- California law requires that prospective employees who have lived out of state at any point in the last 5 years must complete an out-of-state child abuse check prior to working in a licensed children’s residential program.
- However, federal law under the Family First Prevention Services Act of 2019 acknowledges that delays exist between states and only requires the check must be *requested* prior to hire, not *completed*.
- Each state maintains their own database; there is no national system. Requests must be sent to each state, sometimes by physical mail, with checks and “wet” signatures. Each state’s timeframe varies, and it can take upwards of 9 months. This serves as a barrier to starting employment and serving children.
- The CA Alliance surveyed 15 Short Term Residential Therapeutic Programs (STRTPs)—programs providing critical therapeutic interventions for foster youth needing a high level of care in a temporary residential setting—in November 2023. The survey asked about providers’ process of accepting out-of-state employee applicants. Results found that:
 - The average time it takes to clear an out-of-state applicant is 71.5 days—more than 2 months.
 - STRTPs receive an average of 14 applicants from out-of-state. Some agencies report that up to 30% of their applicant pool is from out-of-state.
- Children’s Residential Programs are currently understaffed. This understaffing is the biggest barrier to addressing foster youth’s many and varied needs. Prospective employees cannot always wait for OSCA checks to come back and take other jobs instead. Every day, foster youth languish in hotels, motels, and child welfare offices without supportive environments because of this.

AB 2802 (Maienschein)

 Sponsored by CA Alliance

- AB 2802 emphasizes flexibility in gender identification for housing arrangements within Transitional Housing Placement (THP) Programs, which serve current and former foster youth over the age of 18. The bill prohibits county contracts from requiring that participants identify as the same gender in order to share a unit or bedroom. The bill allows for additional youth voice and choice in partnership with providers.
- Current county practices exclude and discriminate against:
 - Transgender, gender non-conforming or non-binary, and intersex (TGNCI) youth
 - Coparenting youth
 - Siblings who wish to live together, regardless of gender identity
- Flexibility in bedroom sharing is particularly crucial in the context of sibling sets where young adults may identify differently than the sex assigned at birth or when siblings of the opposite sex are close in age and wish to live together. Prioritizing and nurturing sibling bonds contributes significantly to fostering positive outcomes, including but not limited to: mitigation of emotional and behavioral difficulties, heightened mental well-being, and improved academic performance.
- Addressing the needs of young adults exiting from foster care is critical to reducing the foster-care-to-homelessness pipeline. According to the National Alliance to End Homelessness, between 2019 and 2023:
 - The combined number of gender non-binary and gender-questioning people experiencing homelessness increased by at least 183%.
 - This disparity is exacerbated by race and age. Gender-expansive youth of color are twice as likely to experience homelessness compared with their white counterparts. This trend is especially concerning since homelessness worsens physical and mental health conditions, especially the already high risk of self-harm and suicide among gender-expansive youth.
- Pregnant youth are also overrepresented in foster care. According to the National Foster Youth Institute, almost 60% of girls in foster care become pregnant by the age of 19. Current practices prohibit young adults who would like to coparent together from living together if they are from the opposite gender.

AB 2711 (Ramos)

◆ Co-sponsored by CA Alliance, Children Now, CA Youth Empowerment Network, and the CA Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry

- AB 2711 requires school districts or county offices of education to establish a public health framework for identifying and referring youth with substance use needs to community-based services instead of suspending or expelling them from school for possessing or being under the influence of drugs, alcohol, or tobacco products.
- Currently, under California Education Code §48900, school officials have the discretion to determine whether to suspend or expel a student for drug use and/or possession on school grounds. However, administrative discretion has resulted in a disproportionate impact on certain demographics:
 - Over 59% of drug-related suspensions involve boys
 - Over 83% of drug-related suspensions affect socioeconomically disadvantaged students
 - Approximately 82% of drug-related suspensions involve youth of color
- These suspensions deprive youth of valuable instructional time, thereby heightening the risk of academic disengagement, dropout, and involvement in the juvenile justice system.
- AB 2711 will instill a public health approach to assist youth with substance use needs, which prioritizes keeping youth engaged in their education, establishes a community support system, and provides them access to behavioral health services and resources.
- A public health approach will help stem drug use and addiction, ensuring all students receive the help they want and need, remain in school, graduate, and thrive.

FFA Bridge Funding

 Co-sponsored by CA Alliance and National Association of Social Workers, California Chapter

Championed by Assemblymember Pilar Schiavo

- As outlined in the Governor's proposed 2024-25 Budget, the new foster care rate reform rate structure will not be implemented until Fiscal Year 2026-2027. This budget also fails to include a continuation of bridge funding for Foster Family Agencies (FFAs). This combined inaction will result in an 8.8% rate cut to FFAs. FFAs cannot wait over two years without sustaining last year's rate increase.
- FFAs are licensed, non-profit, community-based organizations that recruit and approve resource parents, providing services to children in their care. FFAs support 1 in 4 youth placed in home-based foster care in California, totaling 8,600 youth. FFAs serve youth with higher needs in home-based settings, including providing nearly 100% of Intensive Services Foster Care.
- A new Continuum of Care Reform rate structure will likely not be implemented for at least two years. Without this and a proposed rate increase, some providers will be forced to lay off staff, reduce availability of home-based settings, and likely close their doors. This would negatively impact the State's vision for home-based foster care.
- In January 2024, the CA Alliance surveyed 39 FFAs who serve over 3,500 resource parents. The survey found that:
 - 35.9% of agencies are at risk of shutting down operations in the next 6-12 months if there is no continued rate supplement.
 - 66.7% of agencies are currently downsizing (closing facilities, losing staff) and losing capacity to serve youth due to lack of funding.
 - The average turnover rate in the past year was 36%, with 2/3rds experiencing some staff turnover.
 - FFA programs are experiencing a structural program deficit, ranging from \$10k to \$1.5 million (depending on program size), with most losing over \$200k.
- Multiple research studies show that the loss of a social worker significantly disrupts the permanency process and severs yet another bond in a foster child's life. Each loss of a social worker drops the rate of foster youth permanency dramatically. The chance of permanency after losing one social worker is 74.5%. A loss of three or more social workers drops that rate to just 3.0%.
- In 2019, adoption programs within FFAs saw their funding cut by 20%. It has not been increased since then, compounding the financial strain that foster family agencies are under.
- The CA Alliance is requesting your support on our proposal—championed by Assemblymember Schiavo—and respectfully request a continuation of the previous 8.8% rate increase.

Family Resource Centers

Additional Policy Priorities

- Parents know and trust Family Resource Centers (FRCs) because they are already part of the community. California must invest in these pre-existing but unfunded avenues of the community pathway at the first opportunity new funding streams can be considered.
- Families count on their local Family Resource Centers for mental health services, housing needs, crisis supports, and basic survival items like food and diapers. They are integral to helping families find stability and thrive.
- Parents that Family Resource Centers work with rely on the FRCs as critical resources. Making sure FRCs remain resilient and supported is the best way to avoid child maltreatment in the first place.

CaAIM

Additional Policy Priorities

- CalAIM was an initiative meant to advance and innovate Medi-Cal to create a more coordinated, person-centered, and equitable health system for all Californians. Three of the goals were to:
 - Identify and manage member risk and need through Whole Person Care Approaches and addressing Social Determinants of Health
 - Move Medi-Cal to a more consistent and seamless system by reducing complexity and increasing flexibility
 - Make services more standardized and more equitable across the State, bringing consistency to the current patchwork of programs that vary by county
- The CA Alliance's 165 member organizations are the primary service delivery network for Medi-Cal-covered children and families across the State. However, there have been a number of challenges in the rollout that impacts these organizations' ability to sustain their operations and continue serving our vulnerable children.
- County-by-County differences: CalAIM was intended to streamline documentation and payment systems to make service delivery easier. However, individual counties continue to maintain significant differences, creating challenges for providers, especially those serving multiple counties. These include:
 - wide variances in passthrough rates from county to providers,
 - codes that do not match State billing guidance, and
 - some counties have not yet implemented changes from cost reimbursement because electronic health records are not able to accommodate the new billing process.
- The CA Alliance is working closely with DHCS and other organizations to remove barriers and ensure that members can continue to deliver these essential services for children and families.

Foster Care Rate Reform

- The Governor has released a budget proposal to reform rates paid to resource families and providers for foster youth care and services.
- The CA Alliance believes that any rate structure must fully fund the costs of services that providers (including Foster Family Agencies and Short-Term Residential Therapeutic Programs) deliver to foster youth and include annual adjustments to cover increasing costs.
- The current rate structure does not cover the needs of youth.
- In the Fall of 2022, the State convened over 20 rate workgroups to discuss families' needs, foster family agencies, intensive services, and short-term residential therapeutic programs, and how best to support and achieve the goals of Continuum of Care Reform. There was broad consensus that the current rate structure is not sufficient, with concerns including the need to reduce the number of levels of care currently paid, requesting the utilization of a different tool than the level of care protocol, increasing rates across the board to cover unfunded mandates, the need to factor in higher salaries for providers, and more.
- At any given moment, Foster Family Agencies serve 8,600 children and Short-Term Residential Therapeutic Programs serve over 1,500 children and youth.

Family Urgent Response System

Protecting Policy Priorities

- To close California's budget shortfall, the Governor is proposing to eliminate several important child welfare programs, including the Family Urgent Response System (FURS) (\$30 million CA General Fund).
- Cuts to child welfare programs threaten to harm the very children and youth the State has a moral and legal responsibility to protect, with lifelong impacts.
- What is FURS:
 - FURS is a child welfare-specific support system created by and for youth and their caregivers in 2019.
 - FURS is comprised of both a statewide hotline and local in-person mobile response teams in all 58 counties in California.
 - FURS provides immediate, individualized support anytime, anywhere, regardless of the issue, including in-person support typically within 1 hour.
 - FURS services are provided by dedicated, specially trained staff who understand the unique needs of children and youth in foster care and their families.
 - FURS receives approximately 5,000 requests for support by youth and caregivers annually. The vast majority of these requests have resulted in stabilized placements and ongoing supports.
- What issues does FURS address?
 - FURS meets a critical need within the foster care community.
 - FURS provides support in difficult situations that naturally arise as a result of the unique challenges young people in foster care and their caregivers face as they seek to build relationships and find healing.
 - FURS is also a critical resource to promote stability for older youth who are living on their own, helping ensure a successful transition to adulthood and reducing the likelihood they will experience homelessness.
- FURS Benefits:
 - FURS intervenes early to prevent crises and further trauma and improve outcomes for children and youth in foster care.
 - FURS preserves placements and relationships, reduces the need for higher levels of care, links youth and families to longer-term community supports, and prevents the criminalization of youth in foster care.
 - FURS aids recruitment and retention of caregivers through the promise of a dedicated support system that is there whenever and wherever they need it.
 - FURS reduces the costs associated with frequent placement changes and higher levels of care by preserving placements and ensuring children, youth, and caregivers have the resources and supports they need to be successful.