March 23, 2016 Insert Letter Head

The Honorable Susan Bonilla

Chair of the Human Services Committee

State Capitol Building, Room 4140

Sacramento, CA 95814

***RE: SUPPORT AB 2597 (Cooley) — Ensuring Resource Family Approval Works for Relatives***

Please send to Daphne Hunt in Assembly Human Services (daphne.hunt@asm.ca.gov)

Dear Assemblymember Bonilla:

Your Organization is pleased to support AB 2597 in order to ensure that the Resource Family Approval process accounts for the unique needs of relative foster parents. Relatives will be substantially impacted by implementation of RFA because they will have to go through new risk assessment and psychosocial assessment processes, and meet new training requirements. It is critical that RFA be implemented in a way that holds our relatives to the same high standards as all foster families, while simultaneously being mindful of the unique needs of these caregivers.

Why you organizations is supportive of the bill

Resource Family Approval is a new, unified process of approving foster families that will apply to both relative and non-relative foster homes. By 2017, the only way to be approved as a new foster parent will be to go through RFA; families already approved prior to January 2017 will have additional time to convert to the new RFA standards. Under RFA, relatives – like non-relative foster parent applicants -- will be required to complete training hours, a psychosocial assessment, and risk assessment. Unlike non-relative foster parents, they must meet these requirements while simultaneously responding to the needs of traumatized already residing in their home, and navigating the complexities of the foster care system, courts, schools, and health care systems. Compounding these difficulties, caregivers are not eligible for foster care payments until they have been approved as a resource family, which can take many months. So, during the critical first few months of a child’s placement, relatives must purchase items the child needs, bring their homes into compliance with licensing standards, and often forego paid employment – all without the financial support of foster care payments.

AB 2597 will ensure that the unique needs of relatives are accounted for in the Resource Family Approval process by:

1. Clarifying that a relative who will need to rely on foster care payments to provide for the child’s needs, still meets the ‘financial stability’ requirement for RFA;
2. Allow child-specific approval for kinship caregivers to enable relatives to care for a child, if in the child’s best interest, even if the relative is not able or willing to be approved as a foster parent for ***all*** children;
3. Ensure that RFA is aligned with statutory provisions for immediate placement of children with relatives, prior to home approval;
4. Clarify that a relative has the permanency option of “fit and willing relative” that should be accounted for during the permanency assessment;
5. Ensure that each child placed on an emergency basis receives a CalWORKs payment pending the relative’s approval as a resource family and that foster care funding (AFDC-FC) starts within 90 days of placement even if the approval process is not yet completed, if the reason for the delay is outside the control of the family.

Relatives are truly the backbone of our child welfare system, accounting for fully 35% of our current foster care payments. And, as the state implements the Continuum of Care Reforms with the goal of reducing our reliance on group homes and ensuring that every child is raised in a family, relatives will be critical as they are the most likely individuals to step up and provide a home to a youth stepping down from a group home. Thus, it is essential that the new process of recruiting and supporting resource families, which includes relatives, be responsive to the needs of these caregivers. Without them, our vision for a child-centered, family-based foster care system cannot succeed.

We urge your support for this significant legislation and thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Your signature, name and title