



Summary

Relative caregivers are the backbone of our child welfare system. Relative foster placements are more cost effective, tend to lead to more long term placement stability, and offer better connections to the child's community. Yet, counterintuitively, California's child welfare system often provides inadequate information, support and funding to children placed with relatives. While the law requires California to give preference to relative caregivers when finding a home for children in foster care, there is no corresponding requirement to ensure relative caregivers receive the assistance they need to help these vulnerable children thrive.

Problem

California's child welfare system uses two funding sources to meet the basic needs of foster children placed with relatives: federal foster care benefits and CalWORKs (TANF). Relative foster parents can receive federal foster care benefits if a child meets the federal rules. Unfortunately, because of antiquated federal eligibility rules, 56% of California's foster children are not federally eligible.

Children in relative foster care who do not qualify for federal foster care benefits are eligible to receive CalWORKs, the basic welfare program for low-income families. CalWORKs provides substantially less support than foster care, but this is often the only source of support for the basic needs of foster children placed with relatives.

Often, relatives could help child welfare agencies obtain information from parents to establish eligibility for federal foster care benefits. But child welfare agencies are not required to inform relative caregivers about the eligibility rules.

Further, while counties are required to apply for foster care benefits on behalf of a foster child, there is no corresponding requirement that counties apply for CalWORKs benefits for foster children who are placed with relatives. As a result, relatives who step up to care for foster children are obliged to go to the

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Access to Benefits and Supplemental Supports For Foster Children Placed with Relatives

welfare office and apply for CalWORKs, and are often erroneously denied benefits

Additionally, the state does not pursue child support on behalf of children receiving foster care benefits if such action would interfere with family reunification. However, there is no corresponding protection for foster children receiving CalWORKs. This results in many relatives foregoing the only support available to avoid hurting the chances of reunification.

Finally, foster children placed with relatives who rely on CalWORKs are denied a range of supports that are given to children receiving foster care benefits. These include reimbursement for transportation expenses to ensure that the youth can remain in their school of origin, clothing allowances, the infant supplement that is provided to foster youth who are parenting, and specialized care increments provided to youth with special needs.

Solution

- (1) Require county child welfare agencies to provide relative caregivers with information about the financial supports available and the rules for each program.
- (2) Require county child welfare agencies to complete the application for CalWORKs benefits on behalf of children placed with relatives.
- (3) Exempt foster children placed with relatives who are receiving CalWORKs benefits from the child support collection rules, when those collection efforts would interfere with family reunification.
- (4) Allow foster youth receiving CalWORKs benefits to qualify for other supports including funds for transportation to their school of origin, clothing allowances, infant supplements, and specialized care increments.

For More Information

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