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June 19, 2026

The Honorable Alex Lee
Chair, Assembly Human Services Committee
Hon. Committee Members
1020 N Street, Room 124
Sacramento, CA 95817

RE: SUPPORT AND CO-SPONSORSHIP OF SB 534 (PADILLA)

Dear Chair Lee and Honorable Committee Members:

The Children's Advocacy Institute at the University of San Diego School of Law (CAI), which has sought to advance the well-being of California's children through legal education, advocacy, and litigation for over 30 years, is honored to co-sponsor SB 534 (Padilla) with the Children's Law Center of California (CLC), the largest children's legal services organization in the nation, advocating for tens of thousands of children and youth in the Los Angeles, Sacramento, and Placer County foster care systems. Together, we thank you for authoring this compassionate measure and respectfully urge your colleagues to vote in favor of this bill.

BACKGROUND: FORMER FOSTER YOUTH NEED ALL THE HELP THEY CAN GET

Research is unambiguous: former foster youth – each of them by definition already traumatized – age out into homelessness, poverty, loneliness, and vulnerability.

Between 31% and 46% of former foster youth experience homelessness at least once by age 26.[1] Roughly 70% – *70%!* – of former foster youth who age out are arrested at least once by age 26.[2] In addition, former foster youth face disproportionately high rates of incarceration, which can have negative lifelong negative consequences.[3] One study found that at age 19, nearly one-third of former or current foster youth had at some point received CalFresh benefits, with nearly three-fifths of that group receiving benefits at the time of interview.[4] These statistics point to the prevalence of food insecurity and economic instability in the lives of young people who were and are our legal and moral responsibility; so-called "children of the State".

[1] https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/24148065/
[2] https://www.chapinhall.org/wp-content/uploads/Midwest-Eval-Outcomes-at-Age-26.pdf
[3] https://fosterreprohealth.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Courtney-et-al-Findings-from-the-California-Youth-Transitions-to-Adulthood-Study-CalYOUTH-Conditions-of-Foster-Youth-at-Age-19-2016.pdf.
[4] https://www.chapinhall.org/wp-content/uploads/CY_YT_RE0516.pdf

BEING PLACED IN FOSTER CARE OFTEN MEANS BEING CUT OFF FROM PARENTS, SIBLINGS, AND BROADER FAMILY MEMBERS FOREVER – EVEN WHEN AN ADULT.

When a child is placed in the foster care system, the relationship they have with their parents is legally severed. That too often also results in the child forever being estranged not just from their parents but from their entire broader family: siblings, aunts, uncles, grandparents, cousins.[5]

Indeed, according to one study specifically of California's former foster children, fewer than half (48%) of those who age out of foster care reported having a long-lasting relationship with anyone at all. The rates were lower for Black and Native American youth, at 38% and 25%, respectively.[6]

FORMER FOSTER YOUTH – NOW ADULTS FENDING ENTIRELY FOR THEMSELVES – SHOULD HAVE THE OPTION OF RECONNECTING WITH FAMILY.

Family means possible economic supports and resources. Former foster youth being in contact with birth parents, siblings, and broader family means connections to material and financial resources and supports that they may not otherwise have – the same resources and supports we rely on in hard times: our families. While the opportunities and help offered by family members may not be without complications (like in every family), the complications may be better – safer- - than sleeping with no tent on a street corner or relying upon an abusive trafficker for shelter. Family equates to possible resources and adults should be able to make their own decisions about how, when, and under what circumstances to choose between, for example, sleeping outside at night and a maybe safer alternative.

Family means belonging; means not being alone. The value of family connection isn't just economic. Many former foster children, like most everybody else, simply desire connection with their families. Reconnection is often motivated by a desire to better understand one's identity, family history, and sense of self. Studies have found that many foster youth have said they wish they had received more information from their caseworkers related to their birth family or family history before they exited care.[7] In addition, many former foster youth suffer from mental health challenges upon aging out of the system.[8] Research shows that maintaining or reestablishing birth-family relationships has a critical role in young people's stability, identity, and long-term well-being. [9] Indeed, family connections are a documented protective factor against all of the negative outcomes described in the studies cited above.[10]

All of this is why so many former foster youth seek out their birth parents and related family members. Studies found that between 37% to 55% of former foster children were, even without

[5] https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/10443894241303193?casa_token=mNF-orc4GbgAAAAA%3AIIQ_Q6S8L4V0zWKo5Ca7MjeQpMSj6ztssxXBDufSIA4i8jSzUkZ1suF69NIajOLkZ3EtIFlulYr3
[6] https://asu.elsevierpure.com/en/publications/relationships-that-persist-and-protect-the-role-of-enduring-relat/
[7] https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/40771433/
[8] https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC7163805/
[9] https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/35455564/, https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/20405776/, https://asu.elsevierpure.com/en/publications/relationships-that-persist-and-protect-the-role-of-enduring-relat/, https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/22239390/
[10] Ibid.

help, in contact with their birth mother; 30% to 35% for birth fathers. These rates increased over time. A non-insignificant 16% of former foster children aged 19-20 who aged out of care in California reported actually living with a birth parent.[11]

EVEN THOUGH CASEWORKERS MAY HAVE PARENT AND FAMILY CONTACT INFORMATION IN THEIR CASE FILES, NO LAW REQUIRES SUCH INFORMATION BE OFFERED TO FOSTER CHILDREN AS THEY ARE FORCED TO LIVE ON THEIR OWN.

California law requires counties to provide youth aging out of foster care with essential information, including identification, proof of citizenship, and guidance on housing and employment. However, even when counties possess contact information for birth parents or extended family, there is no requirement to offer this information to traumatized foster youth who are about to be forced to fend entirely for themselves at either 18 or 21 years of age. Nor are foster youth entitled to such information even if the youth requests it. All of the information in a case file – contact information of relatives included – is available to a former foster youth if they have the money to hire a lawyer to file a legal petition pursuant to WIC section 827. Overwhelmingly, they do not.

ENTER SB 534 – A SMALL GESTURE BUT A BIG DIFFERENCE

SB 534 simply requires foster care case workers to offer to foster children being forced to live on their own the option of being provided the last known contact information for parents and siblings and other family members in their case file. Under the bill, this is just an offer – the foster youth is free to decline. The data show this small offer of information already in the possession of case workers could make a life-long difference in the lives of our former foster youth.

Please support SB 534.

Sincerely,



Ed Howard
Senior Counsel,
Children's Advocacy Institute

[11] https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC12380043/