University of San Diego SCHOOL OF LAW

CHILDREN'S ADVOCACY INSTITUTE
5998 Alcalá Park | San Diego, CA 92110-2492
P: (619) 260-4806 | F: (619) 260-4753
Sacramento Office: (916) 844-5646
Washington, DC Office: (917) 371-5191
www.sandiego.edu/cai | info@caichildlaw.or

August 23, 2026

The Honorable Josh Becker
Chair, Senate Human Services Committee
Hon. Committee Members
1020 N Street, Room 521
Sacramento, CA 95814

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

Dear Chair Becker 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, and 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, are pleased to co-sponsor SB 534. Together, we respectfully urge you and your colleagues to vote in favor of this compassionate, modest bill.

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

After exiting the foster care system, many young people face years marked by housing instability, unemployment, loneliness, and economic hardship. 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 impacts. [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 usually also results in the child being forever 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 FOR THEMSELVES – SHOULD HAVE THE OPTION OF RECONNECTING WITH FAMILY.

Being able to reconnect with their 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), they may be better than sleeping with no tent on a street corner or relying upon an abusive trafficker for shelter. Family are resources and adults should be able to make their own decisions about how, when, and under what circumstances to choose sleeping outside at night and a maybe safer alternative.

The value of this bill and 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 former parents and related family members. Studies found that between 37% to 55% of former foster children were, even without help, in contact with their birth mother; 30% to 35% for birth fathers. These rates increased over

[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.

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, 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 foster youth who are about to be forced to fend 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 had the money to hire a lawyer to file a legal petition pursuant to WIC section 827. Overwhelmingly, they do not.

THERE SHOULD BE NO OR NEGLIBLE COSTS CAUSED BY THIS BILL.

There, respectfully, should be little or no costs associated with the enactment of this bill. Only the "last known" relative information – meaning information already in the possession of a county – is specifically required to be offered to a child about to have to fend for themselves on the streets. As the Assembly Human Services Committee observed:

> "When a youth leaves foster care, whether at 18 years of age or at 21 years of age as an NMD, the county is already required to hand over a set of transition documents and information meant to give the young person the tools to function as an adult: identification, a birth certificate, a health-coverage card, a financial-aid verification letter, and a summary of the youth's family and placement history. That last requirement recognizes that a young person leaving care is entitled to know their own story. In practice, however, the history provided is often general, and it may not contain the practical detail a young adult would actually need to find a parent or sibling, such as a current address, a phone number, or a way to reach them online …
>
> By ensuring that a young person leaves care with the contact details their peers never had to think about, this bill gives foster youth the same starting point for sustaining family relationships in adulthood that young people outside the system take for granted."

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. The data show this small offer of information already

[11] https://www.chapinhall.org/research/calyouth-wave3/

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