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California Legislature Pushes For Reform of Foster Care Financing

LOS ANGELES/SACRAMENTO — The California Legislature today established its firm commitment to bettering the lives of the nearly 100,000 abused and neglected children in our state through reform of federal funding of our nation's foster care system. In approving Joint Assembly Resolution 10, introduced by Assemblymember Judy Chu (D - Monterey Park), the legislature recognized the dire need to change rigid federal financing rules that stifle innovation and severely restrict the spending of federal monies on services that have the potential to keep more families intact and reduce the number of children in foster care.

This enactment targets the largest share of federal funding that flows to the state to support abused and neglected children -- Title IVE funds. Current restrictions on this funding stream -- amounting to over \$1.2 billion received by our state each year -- limit funding to children removed from the home and the length of time a child spends in out-of-home care. These funding eligibility requirements create disincentives to service children within their homes and thereby strip the state of any ability to spend federal funds earmarked for foster care on services that could in many cases help children live in safer, more stable, permanent homes.

The legislature today has called for reform of this approach to federal funding and also for approval of a pending "waiver" application that, in the interim, will enable California to receive funds that can be used more flexibly. Similar waivers granted to other states have enabled them to keep more families intact through support of struggling parents, move children more quickly to supported permanent placements, and thereby dramatically decrease the number of children living in foster care.

Assemblymember Chu stated, "Our child welfare system should have the flexibility to provide appropriate and timely services to California's children, whether it is placing them with a foster family or providing services to maintain the family unit. There are many cost-effective and preventive services like mental health and substance abuse treatment that we can use to keep more of our state's children safely in their homes, but under current funding structures, counties don't have the adequate funding to provide those services."

"Without reform of this federal straitjacket," said Miriam Aroni Krinsky, Executive Director of Children's Law Center of Los Angeles, a sponsor of the resolution, "Los

Angeles and other California counties are severely hampered in their attempts to turn the corner and craft new approaches to meeting the multifaceted needs of abused and neglected children. Our system needs to find new ways to keep more families intact, return more children to a safe and supported home environment, or move foster youth into other permanent families. Reform of federal funding is the key that will unlock the door to a new way of doing business for the most vulnerable children in our state.”

Joint Assembly Resolution 10 embraces the recommendations of the independent, bipartisan Pew Commission on Foster Care that federal funds for foster care be reformed to increase programmatic flexibility and reliability of federal funding. The Commission found that “current federal funding mechanisms encourage an over-reliance on foster care at the expense of services that move children to permanent families and help keep families safely together.”

The resolution can be accessed at:
http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/pub/bill/asm/ab_0001-0050/ajr_10_bill_20050315_introduced.html

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