

AB 12 Fact Sheet

California Fostering Connections to Success Act

Introduced by Assembly Member Beall & Speaker Bass

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THE PROBLEM

When California children are removed from their homes and placed in foster care because of abuse and neglect, the state assumes the responsibility of a parent. This responsibility continues until youth leave the foster care system, either by reuniting with their parents, adoption, or legal guardianship or by "emancipation" (reaching the age at which foster care benefits and services are no longer provided).

In 1998, California enacted SB 1901 (McPherson) which established the Kinship Guardianship Assistance Program (Kin-GAP). Kin-GAP has been extremely successful. In 2007-8, the program assisted 14,000 former foster children living with relative guardians. Unlike foster care or adoption however, there have been no federal funds available until now for relative guardianship; all Kin-GAP costs have been borne by California.

Annually, around 5,000 young people emancipate from California's foster care system. Research shows that youth who age out of foster care on their own have lower educational achievement and are more likely to experience homelessness, unemployment, unplanned pregnancies, and involvement with the legal system. Although evidence from other states demonstrates that providing an option for foster care until age 21 dramatically improves these outcomes, federal and California foster care assistance now stop at age 18 or 19.

THIS BILL

In October 2008, the federal government enacted the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act (Public Law 110-351). This new law gives states the ability to establish relative guardianship programs with federal financial participation in the costs. PL 110-351 also makes federal funds available for foster care, kinship-guardianship, and adoption assistance benefits to youth who meet certain conditions (e.g., employment and education related requirements) until age 21. PL 110-351 provides California with an unprecedented opportunity to access federal funding to improve the lives of our state's most vulnerable youth.

AB 12 would ensure that California opts into these essential federal funding opportunities. AB 12 would: 1) re-enact our existing Kin-GAP program to align it with new federal requirements and 2) provide transitional support to qualifying foster youth until age 21. These changes represent both fiscally and socially responsible improvements to California's foster care system. As a result, California would utilize federal funds to meet costs currently borne by the state and counties, and would realize proven savings from declines in unemployment, homelessness, teen pregnancy, public assistance, and the other costly outcomes for young adults who "age out" of foster care.

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