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AB 319: Foster Youth: Trauma-informed, therapeutic continuum care

BILL SUMMARY

AB 319 would require a county to develop and submit plans to the Department of Social Services describing the development needed for a trauma-informed, therapeutic continuum of care to support youth in-state in the least restrictive setting on a specified date. The bill would require the county to submit the first plan by January 1, 2027, and to submit updated plans every 2 years thereafter.

BACKGROUND

California has one of the largest foster care populations in the nation¹, with thousands of children experiencing severe trauma before and during their time in the system. The state has taken steps to improve foster care services through initiatives such as the Continuum of Care Reform (CCR), which emphasizes trauma-informed care, family-based placements, and improved coordination among services providers.

Current law mandates that every county create and execute a memorandum of understanding (MOU) defining the duties and roles of agencies and other organizations serving foster children and youth who have faced significant trauma. It also directs the Secretary of California Health and Human Services and the Superintendent of Public Instruction to form a joint interagency resolution team, composed of members from designated state departments, to aid in implementing these MOUs and perform additional tasks².

Furthermore, the law also requires this team to formulate and present recommendations to the Legislature on several matters, including a statewide strategy for further developing a trauma-informed, therapeutic continuum of care to assist youth in-state within the

least restrictive environments. Additionally, the team is tasked with monitoring and reporting anonymized data on foster children and non-minor dependents who have received support to maintain or obtain new intensive therapeutic services.

Despite these effort, gaps remain in the availability of specialized therapeutic placements for youth with acute behavioral and mental health needs. Many children are placed in settings that do not adequately address their trauma, leading to instability, multiple placements, and poor long-term outcomes. The state has recognized the importance of creating a comprehensive, trauma-informed system of care to support foster youth in the least restrictive environments, but counties lack a standardized approach to expanding these resources³.

PROBLEM

Despite existing frameworks, California struggles to provide consistent, trauma-informed care for foster youth, resulting in disparities across counties. The joint interagency team's recommendations, intended to guide a statewide continuum of care, are not uniformly implemented, leaving some youth in restrictive or out-of-state placements that can worsen trauma. A 2022 report from the California Department of Social Services noted that STRTP capacity remains insufficient, with roughly 3,400 slots statewide against a much higher demand for placement, pushing counties to rely on less optimal solutions⁴.

Without mandated planning and timelines, counties lack the structure to prioritize or expand in-state therapeutic options, undermining the goal of least-restrictive care and perpetuating inequitable access for foster youth with complex needs. Additionally, without structured county-level planning, resources remain unevenly distributed,

¹ [Trends in Foster Care and Adoption: FY 2013 – 2022 | The Administration for Children and Families](#)

² [CHHS-Trauma-Informed-System-of-Care-MOU-Guidance.pdf](#) pg.3

³ [CDSS CCR Issue Brief](#)

⁴ [Continuum of Care Reform Oversight Report](#)

and many youth fail to receive the care they need within their communities.

SOLUTION:

AB 319 provides a structured approach to strengthening California’s trauma-informed foster care system by requiring counties to submit detailed plans outlining how they will expand therapeutic care options. These plans must align with the recommendations of the joint interagency resolution team, ensuring consistency and adherence to best practices statewide. By mandating updates every two years, the bill ensures ongoing evaluation and improvement in service delivery.

This proactive planning process enhances interagency collaboration, streamlines resource allocation, and ultimately improves outcomes for foster youth who have experienced severe trauma. The bill ensures that all counties, regardless of size of funding levels, are held accountable for developing solutions that prioritize the well-being of the most vulnerable children in California’s foster care system⁵.

SUPPORT

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⁵ [California’s Child Welfare System: Addressing Disproportionalities and Disparities](#)