

AB 1954 (Cooley)

Keeping Families Together

Bill Summary

AB 1954 prioritizes minor siblings as preferential relatives for placement within the child welfare system, making it easier for them to be placed in the same home. It facilitates the swift resolution of relative placement assessments and hearings to ensure siblings maintain their family ties.

Problem

Bureaucratic hurdles unrelated to child safety, and/or unnecessary delays in assessing relatives result in many children remaining separated from their siblings and relatives.

For example, large sets of siblings are often separated into different homes not due to safety concerns but instead because of capacity restrictions in the law. This can have life-long consequences on large sibling groups who are closely bonded to each other but are traumatized again by the loss of their sibling into a separate home.

Solution

AB 1954 would amend Welfare and Institutions Code sections 361.3 and 16002 by:

- Extending the definition of relative to include caregivers of minor siblings who are in a permanent plan of placement with a fit and willing relative;
- Clarifying that siblings should be placed together unless there is a showing that placement would be contrary to the well-being and safety of any sibling;
- Establishing a time frame of 15 court days by which courts must consider a request by a relative for placement of a child; and
- Clarifying that emergency placements into a relative or non-relative extended family member's home can occur any time a placement change is being considered.

Background

Keeping siblings connected is often the most critical responsibility of the child welfare system. Studies have shown that children in foster care achieve better outcomes and form life-long supportive relationships when placed together in the same home as their siblings.

Current California law requires that siblings be placed together wherever such an opportunity is possible. However, in situations where one sibling is already in an adoptive home or under a different case plan, there is no requirement that siblings new to the child welfare system be placed with them. (Welf. & Inst. Code section 361.3.)

Postponing relative placement has lasting negative effects on children, causing them further trauma from family separation, interfering with reunification efforts, and preventing them from maintaining connection with their culture and family history.

Support

- Alliance for Children's Rights (Co-Sponsor)
- Children's Law Center (Co-Sponsor)

For More Information

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