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April 4, 2014

The Honorable Roger Dickinson
California State Assembly
State Capitol, Room 2013
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Assemblyman Dickinson:

RE: Foster Parent and Kinship Recruitment, Retention and Support

Solano County supports your efforts to establish a Foster Parent and Kinship Recruitment, Retention and Support fund for county agencies that would be dedicated to the recruitment, retention and support of relative caregivers and licensed foster parents so that they may provide stable, loving homes for children in the foster care system.

County child welfare agencies are required by law to first consider placement with relatives or licensed foster parents when children come into the foster care system. These family-based homes nurture and care for children who have experienced abuse and neglect, and who often have special medical, emotional and psychological needs. Without adequate supports, these foster caregivers can easily become overwhelmed with their care giving responsibilities, which can lead to placement disruptions for foster children, including placements into institutional placement settings such as group homes, which are much more costly for tax payers and less desirable for children.

Unfortunately, in our county we have struggled to maintain an adequate supply of licensed foster families. Solano County currently has 30 state licensed homes with only 1/3 currently parenting or having space for a child which means that children have to be placed out of county or with Foster Family Agencies due to this limited capacity. Foster parents often cite inadequate reimbursement rates and the lack of supportive services as critical factors in deciding whether or not to serve as a foster parent. While reimbursement rates have increased recently due to litigation, other tangible supports and services to foster parents and relative caregivers are severely lacking.

The proposed funding augmentation of $6.75 million State General Funds will provide much needed supports for foster and kin caregivers, and importantly for the children in their care. The funding would enable counties to address local needs and allow for targeted recruitment efforts. Examples of services often requested by foster parents and kin caregivers include respite care, mentoring and coaching to meet children's special needs, support to participate in team-based meetings concerning children in their care, and covering one-time expenses such purchasing an extra bed. In addition, this fund can assist foster parents and kin caregivers to pay for activities that will help "normalize" a child's experience in the foster care system (e.g. participation in school-based activities).

For these reasons, Solano County supports your efforts for additional funding to help recruit, retain and support family caregivers who can provide stable, loving homes for foster children. Thank you for your advocacy on this important issue.

Sincerely,

Linda J. Seifert, Chair
Solano County Board of Supervisors

CC: County Welfare Directors Association of California (CWDA)
Solano County Board of Supervisors
Paul Yoder, Shaw/Yoder/Antwih Inc.