



Children's Law Center of Los Angeles

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Legislature Helps Kids Stay with Kin Instead of Strangers

New Law Supports Relatives When Children Enter Foster Care

LOS ANGELES — A new bill, AB 1913, signed into law this week provides child welfare workers in our state with much needed flexibility in placing children with willing, loving family members instead of strangers. Miriam Krinsky, Executive Director of the Children's Law Center of Los Angeles applauded the measure and observed, "While striving to promote the safety of vulnerable children, we must not overlook the emotional damage done to already traumatized youth when we sever family ties and place them in the care of strangers."

California law requires that relatives be given preference when children are removed from their parents due to neglect, abuse, abandonment, or inability of the parents to care for them. However, the law also requires a criminal background check that takes up to weeks to process. The new measure streamlines this process and promotes relative placements. Assemblywoman Cohn (D-Saratoga), who authored the bill, stated, "It is unconscionable to take an already traumatized child and make them go with a stranger when a family member is available and wants to take the child."

Foster children raised by kin are shown to have fewer behavioral and academic difficulties and better physical and mental health outcomes than children raised by caregivers with whom they have no prior relationship. Research also shows that foster children placed with related caregivers are more likely to live close to their original home, enabling them to maintain school stability and remain more closely connected to their cultural heritage.

In their recent report outlining broad recommendations to overhaul the foster care system, the nonpartisan Pew Commission on Children in Foster Care called for system reform on a national level, including changing current laws to promote subsidized legal guardianships when a close guardian-child attachment exists. The Commission backed guardianships by relatives as a way to give children a faster route out of foster care and into safe, permanent families, explaining "[w]hen guardians are also relatives, guardianship can promote healthy ties to a child's extended family, home community, and culture."

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