



COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

1600 PACIFIC HIGHWAY, ROOM 335, SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA 92101-2470

AGENDA ITEM

DATE: June 4, 2024

04

TO: Board of Supervisors

SUBJECT

SUPPORTING OUR FOSTER CARE YOUTH (DISTRICTS: ALL)

OVERVIEW

As of February 2024, nearly 2,300 children utilized San Diego County Child Welfare Services, with 1,909 youth ages 21 years of age and under participating in the County's foster care system. Our Child Welfare system has improved the lives of youth and their families through recent initiatives including enhanced adoption efforts, reunification, expanded parent-child interaction therapy and counseling, building a kin first culture, and investments in fatherhood engagement and visitation efforts. The County has also committed to ensuring that foster youth who are entitled to survivorship benefits from the Social Security Administration (SSA) receive the full amount of those financial benefits when they reach a certain age and exit the foster care system.

In California, youth can elect to remain in foster care up to the age of 21. Over 85% of San Diego youth choose to remain in care until this age. Unfortunately, it is estimated that 25% of foster youth will become homeless the day they exit the system, with 40%-50% of former foster youth becoming homeless within eighteen months of leaving. Studies show that approximately 50% of the homeless population spent time in foster care. These statistics demonstrate the overrepresentation of former foster youth within the homeless population and their susceptibility of falling into homelessness.

By ensuring SSA survivor benefits are protected and made available to foster youth when exiting the foster care system, counties can help reduce these numbers by ensuring that foster youth have access to funds they can use in transitioning to an independent life.

Foster youth, particularly those whose parents are deceased, do not have the same access to resources and support as non-foster youth. Fortunately, the Social Security Administration will typically provide minors without living parents or legal guardian's monthly survivorship benefits. However, when a youth enters foster care, placement agencies and municipalities have historically

SUBJECT: SUPPORTING OUR FOSTER CARE YOUTH (DISTRICTS: ALL)

received available benefits on behalf of the youth, using these funds to pay for their care and needs. This practice places this vulnerable population at a disadvantage by denying them funds they could otherwise use to begin their life independent of the foster care system.

In April 2023, San Diego County ended this practice when the Aid to Families with Dependent Children-Foster Care (AFDC-FC) stopped counting SSA income against a foster care grant and using these funds to pay for their needs. Accrued SSA benefits now remain in a reserve account for the youth until they turn 18 years old.

Today's action recommends the Board of Supervisors adopt a position of support for Assembly Bill 2906 (Bryan). If enacted into law, AB 2906 would result in the following:

1. Require all California counties to screen and begin applying for SSA benefits within 60 days of a child's entry into care
2. Notify youth recipients and their attorneys when benefits are applied for/received
3. Engage youth in planning for conserved funds
4. Ensure funds are used for a child's unmet current needs or conserved for their foreseeable future needs, and monitor annual accounting of use of funds
5. Provide financial counseling or training to new representative payees on establishing proper accounts to preserve eligibility/managing/disbursing funds

RECOMMENDATION(S)

SUPERVISOR JIM DESMOND AND SUPERVISOR JOEL ANDERSON

1. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer to express the County's support for Assembly Bill 2906, consistent with Board Policy M-2.

EQUITY IMPACT STATEMENT

Foster youth are among the most vulnerable in our community. The enactment of AB 2906 will help ensure that foster youth throughout the State receive the same benefits and resources as non-foster care youth. This legislation is supported by the People's Association of Justice Advocates, a non-profit organization with the mission to empower citizens with lived experience to meaningfully address societal issues impacting them by introducing policy and legislative change to improve those conditions. The legislation is also supported by the University of San Diego Children's Advocacy Institute, a non-profit organization that works to improve the lives of children, with a focus on improving foster care systems and enhancing resources that are available to youth aging out of foster care.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPACT STATEMENT

The proposed action to support AB 2906 would contribute to the County of San Diego Sustainability Goal of providing just and equitable access for underserved populations.

FISCAL IMPACT

SUBJECT: SUPPORTING OUR FOSTER CARE YOUTH (DISTRICTS: ALL)

There is no fiscal impact associated with today's actions to support AB 2906. There will be no change in net General Fund cost and no additional staff years

BUSINESS IMPACT STATEMENT

N/A

ADVISORY BOARD STATEMENT

N/A

BACKGROUND

As of February 2024, nearly 2,300 children utilized San Diego County Child Welfare Services, with 1,909 youth ages 21 years of age and under participating in the County's foster care system. Our Child Welfare system has improved the lives of youth and their families through recent initiatives including enhanced adoption efforts, reunification, expanded parent-child interaction therapy and counseling, building a kin first culture, and investments in fatherhood engagement and visitation efforts. The County has also committed to ensuring that foster youth who are entitled to survivorship benefits from the Social Security Administration (SSA) receive the full amount of those financial benefits when they reach a certain age and exit the foster care system.

In California, youth can elect to remain in foster care up to the age of 21. Over 85% of San Diego youth choose to remain in care until this age. Unfortunately, it is estimated that 25% of foster youth will become homeless the day they exit the system, with 40%-50% of former foster youth becoming homeless within eighteen months of leaving. Studies show that approximately 50% of the homeless population spent time in foster care. These statistics demonstrate the overrepresentation of former foster youth within the homeless population and their susceptibility of falling into homelessness.

By ensuring SSA survivor benefits are protected and made available to foster youth when exiting the foster care system, counties can help reduce these numbers by ensuring that foster youth have access to funds they can use in transitioning to an independent life.

Foster youth, particularly those whose parents are deceased, do not have the same access to resources and support as non-foster youth. Fortunately, the Social Security Administration will typically provide minors without living parents or legal guardian's monthly survivorship benefits. However, when a youth enters foster care, placement agencies and municipalities have historically received available benefits on behalf of the youth, using these funds to pay for their care and needs. This practice places this vulnerable population at a disadvantage by denying them funds they could otherwise use to begin their life independent of the foster care system.

In April 2023, San Diego County ended this practice when the Aid to Families with Dependent Children-Foster Care (AFDC-FC) stopped counting SSA income against a foster care grant and using these funds to pay for their needs. Accrued SSA benefits now remain in a reserve account for the youth until they turn 18 years old.

SUBJECT: SUPPORTING OUR FOSTER CARE YOUTH (DISTRICTS: ALL)

Today's action recommends the Board of Supervisors adopt a position of support for Assembly Bill 2906 (Bryan). If enacted into law, AB 2906 would result in the following:

1. Require all California counties to screen and begin applying for SSA benefits within 60 days of a child's entry into care
2. Notify youth recipients and their attorneys when benefits are applied for/receive
3. Engage youth in planning for conserved funds
4. Ensure funds are used for a child's unmet current needs or conserved for their foreseeable future needs, and monitor annual accounting of use of funds
5. Provide financial counseling or training to new representative payees on establishing proper accounts to preserve eligibility/managing/disbursing funds

Currently, county placing agencies in California are required to screen and apply for disability and survivor benefits on behalf of eligible youth when they come into care.

Advocates report that these agencies often fail to notify the youth and their attorneys that they are applying for benefits, and report that after the youth has been approved for benefits, county placing agencies automatically apply to serve as representative payees for the youth and use the youth's funds to reimburse themselves for the costs of the child's care.

AB 2906 will require all California counties to ensure that the child's benefits are not used to pay for, or to reimburse the placing agency for, any costs of the child's care. The bill will also require the placing agency to promptly notify the child, the child's attorney, and the child's parents or guardians, of any application for benefits administered by the federal SSA made by the agency on the child's behalf.

Further, this bill would also require the assistance the county provides to the foster youth with respect to those benefits to include applicable financial literacy training and support. As a result of these actions, AB 2906 would ensure that eligible foster youth across California have increased resources for a stable and independent life while in care and after they exit care and transition into adulthood.

LINKAGE TO THE COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO STRATEGIC PLAN

Today's proposed action supports the Community (Quality of Life and Partnership) Strategic Initiative in the County of San Diego's 2024-2029 Strategic Plan by helping to ensure safe communities that improve the quality of life for all residents.

SUBJECT: SUPPORTING OUR FOSTER CARE YOUTH (DISTRICTS: ALL)

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jim Demsond". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Jim" and last name "Demsond" clearly distinguishable.

JIM DEMSOND
Supervisor, Fifth District

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Joel Anderson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Joel" and last name "Anderson" clearly distinguishable.

JOEL ANDERSON
Supervisor, Second District

ATTACHMENT(S)
N/A