

State of California

WELFARE AND INSTITUTIONS CODE

Section 16501

16501. (a) (1) As used in this chapter, “child welfare services” means public social services that are directed toward the accomplishment of any or all of the following purposes:

(A) Protecting and promoting the welfare of all children, including disabled, homeless, dependent, or neglected children.

(B) Preventing or remedying, or assisting in the solution of problems that may result in, the neglect, abuse, exploitation, or delinquency of children.

(C) Preventing the unnecessary separation of children from their families by identifying family problems, assisting families in resolving their problems, and preventing breakup of the family where the prevention of child removal is desirable and possible.

(D) Restoring to their families children who have been removed, by the provision of services to the child and the families.

(E) Identifying children to be placed in suitable adoptive homes, in cases where restoration to the biological family is not possible or appropriate.

(F) Ensuring adequate care of children away from their homes, in cases where the child cannot be returned home or cannot be placed for adoption.

(2) “Child welfare services” also means services provided on behalf of children alleged to be the victims of child abuse, neglect, or exploitation. The child welfare services provided on behalf of each child represent a continuum of services, including emergency response services, family preservation services, family maintenance services, family reunification services, and permanent placement services, including supportive transition services. The individual child’s case plan is the guiding principle in the provision of these services. The case plan shall be developed within a maximum of 60 days of the initial removal of the child or of the in-person response required under subdivision (f) if the child has not been removed from his or her home, or by the date of the dispositional hearing pursuant to Section 358, whichever comes first.

(3) “Child welfare services” are best provided in a framework that integrates service planning and delivery among multiple service systems, including the mental health system, using a team-based approach, such as a child and family team. A child and family team brings together individuals that engage with the child or youth and family in assessing, planning, and delivering services consistent with paragraph (1) of subdivision (d) of Section 16501.1. Use of a team approach increases efficiency, and thus reduces cost, by increasing coordination of formal services and integrating the natural and informal supports available to the child or youth and family.

(4) “Child and family team” means a group of individuals who are convened by the placing agency and who are engaged through a variety of team-based processes to identify the strengths and needs of the child or youth and his or her family, and to help achieve positive outcomes for safety, permanency, and well-being.

(A) The activities of the team shall include, but not be limited to, both of the following:

(i) Providing input into the development of a child and family plan that is strengths-based, needs-driven, and culturally relevant.

(ii) Providing input into the placement decision made by the placing agency and the services to be provided in order to support the child or youth.

(B) (i) The child and family team process shall engage the child or youth, the child’s family, and other people important to the family or to the child or youth in meeting the objectives set forth in subparagraph (A). The child and family team shall also include representatives who provide formal supports to the child or youth and family when appropriate, including, but not limited to, all of the following:

(I) The caregiver.

(II) The placing agency caseworker.

(III) A representative from a foster family agency or short-term residential therapeutic program with which a child or youth is placed.

(IV) A county mental health representative.

(V) A representative from the regional center if the child is eligible for regional center services.

(VI) The child or youth’s Court-Appointed Special Advocate, if one has been appointed, unless the child or youth objects.

(VII) A representative of the child or youth’s tribe or Indian custodian, as applicable.

(ii) As appropriate, the child and family team also may include other formal supports, such as substance use disorder treatment professionals and educational professionals, providing services to the child or youth and family. For purposes of this definition, the child and family team also may include extended family and informal support persons, such as friends, coaches, faith-based connections, and tribes as identified by the child or youth and family. If placement into a short-term residential therapeutic program or a foster family agency that provides treatment services has occurred or is being considered, the mental health representative is required to be a licensed mental health professional. Any party to the child’s case who is represented by an attorney may consult with his or her attorney regarding this process. The child or youth and his or her family may request specific persons to be included on the child and family team. Nothing shall preclude another agency serving the child or youth from convening a team in collaboration with the placing agency.

(5) Child welfare services may include, but are not limited to, a range of service-funded activities, including case management, counseling, emergency shelter care, emergency in-home caretakers, temporary in-home caretakers, respite care, therapeutic day services, teaching and demonstrating homemakers, parenting training, substance abuse testing, transportation, and specialized permanency services. These

service-funded activities shall be available to children and their families in all phases of the child welfare program in accordance with the child's case plan and departmental regulations. Funding for services is limited to the amount appropriated in the annual Budget Act and other available county funds.

(6) Service-funded activities to be provided may be determined by each county, based upon individual child and family needs as reflected in the service plan.

(7) As used in this chapter, "emergency shelter care" means emergency shelter provided to children who have been removed pursuant to Section 300 from their parent or parents or their guardian or guardians. The department may establish, by regulation, the time periods for which emergency shelter care shall be funded. For the purposes of this paragraph, "emergency shelter care" may include "transitional shelter care facilities" as defined in paragraph (11) of subdivision (a) of Section 1502 of the Health and Safety Code.

(8) As used in this chapter, "specialized permanency services" means services to assist a child or nonminor dependent whose case plan is for permanent placement or supportive transition to adulthood in achieving a permanent family through reunification, adoption, legal guardianship, or other lifelong connection to caring adults, including at least one adult who will provide a permanent, parent-like relationship for the child or nonminor dependent. Specialized permanency services are designed for and with the child to address the child's history of trauma, separation, and loss. "Specialized permanency services" may include all of the following:

(A) Medically necessary mental health services, if the medical necessity criteria for Medi-Cal specialty mental health services, as described in Section 1830.205 or 1830.210 of Title 9 of the California Code of Regulations, is met, as needed to ameliorate impairments in significant areas of life functioning that may reduce the likelihood of the child or nonminor dependent achieving a permanent family, and may include other services designed to address the child's or nonminor dependent's history of trauma, grief, loss, stigma, and rejection that reduce the likelihood of the child or nonminor dependent achieving a permanent family.

(B) Permanency support core services, as appropriate to achieve, stabilize, and sustain the child or nonminor dependent in a permanent family.

(C) Services designed to prepare the identified permanent family to meet the child's or nonminor dependent's needs, set appropriate expectations before and after permanency is achieved, and stabilize the placement.

(b) As used in this chapter, "respite care" means temporary care for periods not to exceed 72 hours, and, in order to preserve the placement, may be extended up to 14 days in any one month pending the development of policies and regulations in consultation with county placing agencies and stakeholders. This care may be provided to the child's parents or guardians. This care shall not be limited by regulation to care over 24 hours. These services shall not be provided for the purpose of routine, ongoing child care.

(c) The county shall provide child welfare services as needed pursuant to an approved service plan and in accordance with regulations promulgated, in consultation with the counties, by the department. Counties may contract for service-funded

activities, as defined in paragraph (1) of subdivision (a). Counties shall not contract for needs assessment, client eligibility determination, or any other activity as specified by regulations of the State Department of Social Services, except as specifically authorized in Section 16100.

(d) This chapter shall not be construed to affect duties that are delegated to probation officers pursuant to Sections 601 and 654.

(e) A county may utilize volunteer individuals to supplement professional child welfare services by providing ancillary support services in accordance with regulations adopted by the State Department of Social Services.

(f) As used in this chapter, emergency response services consist of a response system providing in-person response, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, to reports of abuse, neglect, or exploitation, as required by Article 2.5 (commencing with Section 11164) of Chapter 2 of Title 1 of Part 4 of the Penal Code for the purpose of investigation pursuant to Section 11166 of the Penal Code and to determine the necessity for providing initial intake services and crisis intervention to maintain the child safely in his or her own home or to protect the safety of the child. County welfare departments shall respond to any report of imminent danger to a child immediately and all other reports within 10 calendar days. An in-person response is not required when the county welfare department, based upon an evaluation of risk, determines that an in-person response is not appropriate. This evaluation includes collateral contacts, a review of previous referrals, and other relevant information, as indicated.

(g) As used in this chapter, family maintenance services are activities designed to provide in-home protective services to prevent or remedy neglect, abuse, or exploitation, for the purposes of preventing separation of children from their families.

(h) As used in this chapter, family reunification services are activities designed to provide time-limited foster care services to prevent or remedy neglect, abuse, or exploitation, when the child cannot safely remain at home, and needs temporary foster care, while services are provided to reunite the family.

(i) (1) As used in this chapter, permanent placement services are activities designed to provide an alternate permanent family structure for children who, because of abuse, neglect, or exploitation, cannot safely remain at home and who are unlikely to ever return home. These services shall be provided on behalf of children for whom there has been a judicial determination of a permanent plan for adoption, legal guardianship, placement with a fit and willing relative, or continued foster care placement, and, as needed, shall include supportive transition services to nonminor dependents, as described in subdivision (v) of Section 11400.

(2) For purposes of this section, “another planned permanent living arrangement” means a permanent plan ordered by the court for a child 16 years of age or older or a nonminor dependent, when there is a compelling reason or reasons to determine that it is not in the best interest of the child or nonminor dependent to return home, be placed for adoption, be placed for tribal customary adoption in the case of an Indian child, or be placed with a fit and willing relative. Placement in a group home, or, on and after January 1, 2017, a short-term residential therapeutic program, shall not be the identified permanent plan for any child or nonminor dependent.

(j) As used in this chapter, family preservation services include those services specified in Section 16500.5 to avoid or limit out-of-home placement of children, and may include those services specified in that section to place children in the least restrictive environment possible.

(k) (1) (A) In any county electing to implement this subdivision, all county welfare department employees who have frequent and routine contact with children shall, by February 1, 1997, and all welfare department employees who are expected to have frequent and routine contact with children and who are hired on or after January 1, 1996, and all such employees whose duties change after January 1, 1996, to include frequent and routine contact with children, shall, if the employees provide services to children who are alleged victims of abuse, neglect, or exploitation, sign a declaration under penalty of perjury regarding any prior criminal conviction, and shall provide a set of fingerprints to the county welfare director.

(B) The county welfare director shall secure from the Department of Justice a criminal record to determine whether the employee has ever been convicted of a crime other than a minor traffic violation. The Department of Justice shall deliver the criminal record to the county welfare director.

(C) If it is found that the employee has been convicted of a crime, other than a minor traffic violation, the county welfare director shall determine whether there is substantial and convincing evidence to support a reasonable belief that the employee is of good character so as to justify frequent and routine contact with children.

(D) An exemption shall not be granted pursuant to subparagraph (C) if the person has been convicted of a sex offense against a minor, or has been convicted of an offense specified in Section 220, 243.4, 264.1, 273d, 288, or 289 of the Penal Code, or in paragraph (1) of Section 273a of, or subdivision (a) or (b) of Section 368 of, the Penal Code, or has been convicted of an offense specified in subdivision (c) of Section 667.5 of the Penal Code. The county welfare director shall suspend such a person from any duties involving frequent and routine contact with children.

(E) Notwithstanding subparagraph (D), the county welfare director may grant an exemption if the employee or prospective employee, who was convicted of a crime against an individual specified in paragraph (1) or (7) of subdivision (c) of Section 667.5 of the Penal Code, has been rehabilitated as provided in Section 4852.03 of the Penal Code and has maintained the conduct required in Section 4852.05 of the Penal Code for at least 10 years and has the recommendation of the district attorney representing the employee's or prospective employee's county of residence, or if the employee or prospective employee has received a certificate of rehabilitation pursuant to Chapter 3.5 (commencing with Section 4852.01) of Title 6 of Part 3 of the Penal Code. In that case, the county welfare director may give the employee or prospective employee an opportunity to explain the conviction and shall consider that explanation in the evaluation of the criminal conviction record.

(F) If criminal record information has not been recorded, the county welfare director shall cause a statement of that fact to be included in that person's personnel file.

(2) For purposes of this subdivision, a conviction means a plea or verdict of guilty or a conviction following a plea of nolo contendere. An action that the county welfare

director is permitted to take following the establishment of a conviction may be taken when the time for appeal has elapsed, or the judgment of conviction has been affirmed on appeal or when an order granting probation is made suspending the imposition of sentence, notwithstanding a subsequent order pursuant to Sections 1203.4 and 1203.4a of the Penal Code permitting the person to withdraw his or her plea of guilty and to enter a plea of not guilty, or setting aside the verdict of guilty, or dismissing the accusation, information, or indictment. For purposes of this subdivision, the record of a conviction, or a copy thereof certified by the clerk of the court or by a judge of the court in which the conviction occurred, shall be conclusive evidence of the conviction.

(Amended by Stats. 2018, Ch. 151, Sec. 1. (SB 925) Effective January 1, 2019.)