

Senate Bill 1051

Emergency Child Care Bridge: No Wrong Door

Senator Caroline Menjivar (D – San Fernando Valley)

SUMMARY

Senate Bill 1051 would empower Bridge Navigators to submit referrals to county child welfare agencies for their approval of a childcare voucher for an eligible foster child under the Emergency Child Care Bridge (Bridge) Program. Social workers would retain full authority to determine eligibility for the Bridge program, but they would now have greater support to ensure that no child falls through the cracks in accessing this necessary resource.

PROBLEM

While foster families are provided with resources to meet a child's basic needs, the resources are not enough to also cover the cost of childcare. Especially when the emergency nature of placements and long waitlists at most childcare providers present additional barriers to accessing childcare. In some cases, a working foster parent cannot go to work, causing them to question their ability to continue fostering, and the stable home can quickly become at risk for the child.

Nationwide, high rates of staff turnover have plagued child protection agencies¹, and retaining a highly qualified workforce has become even more difficult in recent years.² By empowering Bridge Navigators to provide this information and coordinating directly with social workers on the back end to collect all necessary details, we would work to eliminate long wait periods and information gaps. With SB 1051, families will not fall through the cracks in accessing this vital resource. Social workers will still retain the authority to determine eligibility, but families will be one step closer to securing their childcare vouchers

BACKGROUND

The Bridge Program was enacted in the 2017-18 budget to mitigate one of the top barriers to finding and maintaining

stable family homes for children in foster care with affordable childcare. While foster children are a priority for subsidized childcare, the timing and availability of a slot may not always align with the timing of a placement, and the cost of care out of pocket may be too high for foster families.

A survey conducted by the Child Care Resource Center, which was presented to the California Health and Human Services Child Welfare Council, found that 70% of caregivers reported reduced economic stress due to the Bridge Program. Further research demonstrated that the initial stage of placement is when children are at greatest risk for experiencing placement instability, especially in the first six to seven months.³

Reducing placement instability was an impetus for the creation of the program. It was designed to address the needs of prospective working foster parents, relative caregivers, and parenting foster youth by providing:

- Vouchers to pay for childcare for 6-12 months,
- Navigators to assist families with accessing long-term childcare (regardless of whether they are using a voucher), and
- Training and coaching to childcare providers on how to best meet the needs of children who have experienced abuse and neglect.

Currently, 48 counties are participating in this program.

SOLUTION

SB 1051 would alleviate some of the pressure on social workers and would empower another trusted partner working with the child and family to leverage this critical support. It will strengthen the original intent of the Bridge Program, ensuring childcare is not a barrier to keeping

¹ Pietrowiak, Diana, and Joy Gambino. "GAO-03-357 Highlights, Child Welfare." United States General Accounting Office, www.gao.gov/assets/gao-03-357-highlights.pdf. Accessed 18 Feb. 2026.

² Pietrowiak, Diana, and Joy Gambino. "GAO-03-357 Highlights, Child Welfare." United States General Accounting Office, www.gao.gov/assets/gao-03-357-highlights.pdf. Accessed 18 Feb. 2026.

³ Placement Stability in Child Welfare Services Issues, Concerns, Outcomes, www.cdss.ca.gov/cfsweb/res/pdf/PlacementStability.pdf. Accessed 18 Feb. 2026.

children in safe, stable family homes.

STATUS

Introduced- February 12, 2026

SUPPORT

Alliance for Children's Rights (Co-sponsor)
California Childcare Resource and Referral Network (Co-sponsor)
Child Care Alliance of Los Angeles (Co-sponsor)
Child Care Resource Center (CCRC) (Co-sponsor)
Children Now (Co-sponsor)
County Welfare Directors Association of California (Co-sponsor)
Crystal Stairs (Co-sponsor)
Thriving Families California Foundation (Co-sponsor)
Early Edge California
The Resource Connection

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