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AB 2051: Maintaining Important Connections for Youth in Foster Care

SUMMARY

AB 2051 protects the strong connections between foster siblings by including them into the visitation provisions of existing law.

EXISTING LAW/BACKGROUND

According to the Children's Bureau at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, "sibling relationships can provide a source of continuity throughout a child's lifetime and can be the longest relationships that people experience." However, for children involved with the foster system, "separation or infrequent visiting can cause those relationships to wither, sometimes to the point of permanent estrangement." This is particularly dangerous as studies have shown that preserving sibling connections and relationships while in foster care has tremendous mental health benefits for foster youth.

As a result, California law directs child welfare agencies and the courts to develop and maintain sibling relationships. In implementing this, focus is often placed on sibling relationships through blood or adoption. This creates issues for youth who have spent an extensive amount of time in placement with other children who – despite no biological relationship – they still consider to be siblings.

Children in the foster care system may experience a number of different homes and, as a result of a shared home and

shared experiences, may develop strong sibling-like ties with other children, despite no biological relationship.

Currently, there is no explicit provision in statute allowing for foster siblings to maintain their relationship if they move placements, but remain in the foster system. Thus foster siblings could face another family separation with little to no opportunity to maintain a relationship with their foster sibling. The instability associated with frequent movements and separations is already detrimental to the mental health of foster youth, and difficulty in maintaining contact between foster siblings often further exacerbates existing trauma.

THIS BILL

AB 2051 strengthens visitation rights for foster siblings by defining foster sibling relationships and clarifying that this important relationship is one of the connections required to be developed and maintained by the child welfare agencies while the foster siblings remain in out of home care.

SUPPORT

Children's Law Center (Sponsor)

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