

Assembly Bill 366

Keeping Families Together

(Rubio)

Background

Many sibling groups are separated upon entry into the foster care system; less frequently, siblings are placed together in out-of-home care initially and later separated. Some siblings are adopted by different families. Sadly, many of these separated brothers and sisters lose contact with one another.¹ Studies have shown that children in foster care achieve better outcomes and form life-long supportive relationships when placed together in the same home as their siblings². One of the most common positive outcomes cited as associated with joint placement is greater placement stability, meaning that children who are placed with their siblings tend to experience fewer disruptions in their placements.³

Experiencing maltreatment and being removed from their homes are traumatic experiences for children. They can cause children to suffer from feelings of worry and confusion as well as loss of identity, self-esteem, and a sense of belonging, which can be exasperated by separation from a sibling (Wojciak, McWey, & Waid, 2018). Preserving ties with siblings, however, can help buffer children from the negative effects of maltreatment and removal from the home (Aguiniga & Madden, 2018).

Studies have also shown that living with a caring relative greatly increases the likelihood of siblings residing together, especially for large sibling sets. Placement with a relative and/or sibling as quickly as possible after removal from a parent provides many recognized benefits, including reducing the amount of trauma experienced by children removed from their parents and maintaining a familiar and comfortable home-like setting for children in the dependency system.

¹ Emily Kernan, [Keeping Siblings Together: Past, Present, and Future](#)

² Children's Bureau/ACYF/ACF/HHS [Sibling Issues in Foster Care](#)

³ Sonya J. Leathers, Separation from Siblings: Association with Placement Adaptation and Outcomes among Adolescents in Long-Term Foster Care, 27 Children and Youth Services Review (2005).

The Problem

Current California law provides that children shall be placed with siblings unless it is detrimental, and there is a strong statutory preference for relative placement. In practice, however, many children remain separated from their siblings and relatives due to bureaucratic hurdles that are unrelated to child safety, or unnecessary delays in assessing relatives.

For example, large sets of siblings are often separated into different homes not due to safety concerns but instead because of capacity restrictions in the law. This can have life-long consequences on large sibling groups who are closely bonded to each other and are traumatized again by the loss of their sibling into a separate home.

Postponing relative placement has lasting negative affects on children, causing them further trauma from family separation, interfering with reunification efforts, and preventing them from maintaining connection with their culture and family history.

Solution

AB 366 would amend Welfare and Institutions Code sections 16002, 16004 and 16519.5 to clarify that:

- Siblings should be placed together unless there is a showing that placement would be contrary to the well-being and safety of any sibling; and
- An approved resource family shall be presumed to have the size and space to place siblings together.

Support

Alliance for Children's Rights (**Co-sponsor**)

Children's Law Center of California (**Co-sponsor**)

For More Information

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