



CWDA

July 19, 2012

The Honorable Kevin DeLeon
Room 5108, State Capitol
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Senator DeLeon:

**RE: SB 1064 (De Leon) As Amended April 16, 2012 –
SUPPORT**

The County Welfare Directors Association of California (CWDA) has taken a position of SUPPORT on your SB 1064 by Senator De Leon. This bill would support and enhance family reunification efforts in the child welfare system for immigrant families.

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As a result of increased collaboration between U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement and local law enforcement through programs that deputize law enforcement as immigration agents, the number of detained parents is rising substantially. Unfortunately, these parents also are at risk of losing custody of their children in the process. Currently there are at least 5,100 children nationwide in the child welfare system because their parents are under immigration custody or have been deported, and this number is expected to grow in the next five years. The majority of these children are United States citizens.

When children enter the child welfare system due to abuse or neglect, social workers prioritize family reunification when in the best interest of the child. However, many immigrant families have a limited opportunity for family reunification because of detention or deportation. A parent accused of a non-serious crime would normally be released from custody and thus would be able to follow through with the family reunification process. In contrast, non-citizen parents are frequently unable to access services and meet requirements set out by dependency courts to regain custody of their children. This is further complicated by a parent's deportation because of the difficulty in making arrangements in the country of origin. Because immigrant relatives may be willing to take custody of a child when a parent is detained or deported, it is critical to ensure that the courts and social workers understand that children can be placed with parents and relatives even if they are undocumented.

Many counties, such as Los Angeles, Santa Clara, San Francisco, and Fresno, have policies in place that make family reunification or relative placement feasible for these families, including alternative ways of identifying relatives for background checks and partnerships with foreign consulates. Systemic policies that specifically address these issues for the entire state, as SB 1064 would provide, will help to ensure that children whose parents are placed in stable environments.

Given California's fiscal woes, promoting relative placement and family reunification for immigrant families has the potential to decrease costs in the child

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welfare system, as fewer children will be placed into care in the first place and fewer will be kept in foster care unnecessarily. For these reasons CWDA has taken a position of SUPPORT on your SB 1060.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Cathy Senderling-McDonald". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Cathy Senderling-McDonald
Deputy Executive Director