

Assembly Bill No. 1913

CHAPTER 373

An act to amend Section 319 of, to amend and repeal Section 309 of, and to repeal and amend Section 361.4 of, the Welfare and Institutions Code, relating to foster care.

[Approved by Governor August 27, 2004. Filed with Secretary of State August 30, 2004.]

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

AB 1913, Cohn. Foster care providers: evaluation and criminal records checks.

(1) Existing law sets forth circumstances under which a minor may be adjudged a dependent child of the juvenile court, and establishes procedures to determine the temporary placement of a dependent child.

Existing law authorizes temporary placement of a minor child in the home of an able and willing relative, or an able and willing nonrelative extended family member, upon completion of an assessment of the suitability of the relative or nonrelative extended family member by the county welfare department. Under existing law, the standards used to evaluate and grant or deny approval of the home of a relative or nonrelative extended family member for the placement of a child are required to be the same standards as set forth in regulations for licensing foster family homes. Under existing law, these provisions become inoperative and are to be replaced with similar provisions on January 1, 2006.

Existing law separately provides for Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) for children who have been removed from their homes in certain instances.

This bill would delete the date upon which the above provisions become inoperative and would repeal the alternative provisions. The bill would require, immediately following the placement of a child in the home of a relative or a nonrelative extended family member, that the county welfare department evaluate and approve or deny the home for purposes of AFDC-FC eligibility. By expanding the duties of county welfare departments in this regard, the bill would impose a state-mandated local program.

(2) Existing law requires the county social worker to visit the home of a relative or prospective guardian who is not a licensed or certified foster parent, prior to placing the child in that home, to ascertain the appropriateness of the placement. Existing law also requires the court or



county social worker to initiate a state and federal criminal records check through the California Law Enforcement Telecommunications System, and within 5 days after that to initiate a fingerprint clearance check of the person through the Department of Justice. Existing law requires the court and county social worker to consider the home of the person for placement of the child, if the fingerprint clearance check indicates that the person has no criminal record. Existing law provides until January 1, 2005, that the child shall not be placed in the home of the person if the fingerprint clearance check indicates that the person has been convicted of a crime that would preclude licensure as a community care facility, unless a criminal records exemption approved by the Director of Social Services has been granted by the county.

This bill would revise these provisions, including extending their application to January 1, 2010, authorizing the placement of a child, based on the results of the criminal records check, instead of the fingerprint clearance check, and making other, technical changes.

(3) The California Constitution requires the state to reimburse local agencies and school districts for certain costs mandated by the state. Statutory provisions establish procedures for making that reimbursement, including the creation of a State Mandates Claims Fund to pay the costs of mandates that do not exceed \$1,000,000 statewide and other procedures for claims whose statewide costs exceed \$1,000,000.

This bill would provide that, if the Commission on State Mandates determines that the bill contains costs mandated by the state, reimbursement for those costs shall be made pursuant to these statutory provisions.

The people of the State of California do enact as follows:

SECTION 1. Section 309 of the Welfare and Institutions Code, as amended by Section 3 of Chapter 918 of the Statutes of 2002, is amended to read:

309. (a) Upon delivery to the social worker of a child who has been taken into temporary custody under this article, the social worker shall immediately investigate the circumstances of the child and the facts surrounding the child's being taken into custody and attempt to maintain the child with the child's family through the provision of services. The social worker shall immediately release the child to the custody of the child's parent, guardian, or responsible relative unless one or more of the following conditions exist:

(1) The child has no parent, guardian, or responsible relative; or the child's parent, guardian, or responsible relative is not willing to provide care for the child.



(2) Continued detention of the child is a matter of immediate and urgent necessity for the protection of the child and there are no reasonable means by which the child can be protected in his or her home or the home of a responsible relative.

(3) There is substantial evidence that a parent, guardian, or custodian of the child is likely to flee the jurisdiction of the court.

(4) The child has left a placement in which he or she was placed by the juvenile court.

(5) The parent or other person having lawful custody of the child voluntarily surrendered physical custody of the child pursuant to Section 1255.7 of the Health and Safety Code and did not reclaim the child within the 14-day period specified in subdivision (e) of that section.

(b) In any case in which there is reasonable cause for believing that a child who is under the care of a physician or surgeon or a hospital, clinic, or other medical facility and cannot be immediately moved is a person described in Section 300, the child shall be deemed to have been taken into temporary custody and delivered to the social worker for the purposes of this chapter while the child is at the office of the physician or surgeon or the medical facility.

(c) If the child is not released to his or her parent or guardian, the child shall be deemed detained for purposes of this chapter.

(d) (1) If an able and willing relative, as defined in Section 319, or an able and willing nonrelative extended family member, as defined in Section 362.7, is available and requests temporary placement of the child pending the detention hearing, the county welfare department shall initiate an assessment of the relative's or nonrelative extended family member's suitability, which shall include an in-home inspection to assess the safety of the home and the ability of the relative or nonrelative extended family member to care for the child's needs, and a consideration of the results of a criminal records check conducted pursuant to Section 16504.5 and a check of allegations of prior child abuse or neglect concerning the relative or nonrelative extended family member and other adults in the home. Upon completion of this assessment, the child may be placed in the assessed home. For purposes of this paragraph, and except for the criminal records check conducted pursuant to Section 16504.5, the standards used to determine suitability shall be the same standards set forth in the regulations for the licensing of foster family homes.

(2) Immediately following the placement of a child in the home of a relative or a nonrelative extended family member, the county welfare department shall evaluate and approve or deny the home for purposes of AFDC-FC eligibility pursuant to Section 11402. The standards used to evaluate and grant or deny approval of the home of the relative and of



the home of a nonrelative extended family member, as described in Section 362.7, shall be the same standards set forth in regulations for the licensing of foster family homes which prescribe standards of safety and sanitation for the physical plant and standards for basic personal care, supervision, and services provided by the caregiver.

(3) If a relative or nonrelative extended family member meets all other conditions for approval, except for the receipt of the Federal Bureau of Investigation's criminal history information for the relative or nonrelative extended family member, and other adults in the home, as indicated, the county welfare department may approve the home and document that approval, if the relative or nonrelative extended family member, and each adult in the home, has signed and submitted a statement that he or she has never been convicted of a crime in the United States, other than a traffic infraction as defined in paragraph (1) of subdivision (a) of Section 42001 of the Vehicle Code. If, after the approval has been granted, the department determines that the relative or nonrelative extended family member or other adult in the home has a criminal record, the approval may be terminated.

SEC. 2. Section 309 of the Welfare and Institutions Code, as amended by Section 4 of Chapter 918 of the Statutes of 2002, is repealed.

SEC. 3. Section 319 of the Welfare and Institutions Code is amended to read:

319. (a) At the initial petition hearing, the court shall examine the child's parents, guardians, or other persons having relevant knowledge and hear the relevant evidence as the child, the child's parents or guardians, the petitioner, or their counsel desires to present. The court may examine the child, as provided in Section 350.

(b) The social worker shall report to the court on the reasons why the child has been removed from the parent's custody; the need, if any, for continued detention; the available services and the referral methods to those services that could facilitate the return of the child to the custody of the child's parents or guardians; and whether there are any relatives who are able and willing to take temporary custody of the child. The court shall order the release of the child from custody unless a prima facie showing has been made that the child comes within Section 300, the court finds that continuance in the parent's or guardian's home is contrary to the child's welfare, and any of the following circumstances exist:

(1) There is a substantial danger to the physical health of the child or the child is suffering severe emotional damage, and there are no reasonable means by which the child's physical or emotional health may be protected without removing the child from the parents' or guardians' physical custody.



(2) There is substantial evidence that a parent, guardian, or custodian of the child is likely to flee the jurisdiction of the court.

(3) The child has left a placement in which he or she was placed by the juvenile court.

(4) The child indicates an unwillingness to return home, if the child has been physically or sexually abused by a person residing in the home.

(c) If the matter is continued pursuant to Section 322 or for any other reason, the court shall find that the continuance of the child in the parent's or guardian's home is contrary to the child's welfare at the initial petition hearing or order the release of the child from custody.

(d) (1) The court shall also make a determination on the record, referencing the social worker's report or other evidence relied upon, as to whether reasonable efforts were made to prevent or eliminate the need for removal of the child from his or her home, pursuant to subdivision (b) of Section 306, and whether there are available services that would prevent the need for further detention. Services to be considered for purposes of making this determination are case management, counseling, emergency shelter care, emergency in-home caretakers, out-of-home respite care, teaching and demonstrating homemakers, parenting training, transportation, and any other child welfare services authorized by the State Department of Social Services pursuant to Chapter 5 (commencing with Section 16500) of Part 4 of Division 9. The court shall also review whether the social worker has considered whether a referral to public assistance services pursuant to Chapter 2 (commencing with Section 11200) and Chapter 7 (commencing with Section 14000) of Part 3, Chapter 1 (commencing with Section 17000) of Part 5, and Chapter 10 (commencing with Section 18900) of Part 6 of Division 9 would have eliminated the need to take temporary custody of the child or would prevent the need for further detention.

(2) If the child can be returned to the custody of his or her parent or guardian through the provision of those services, the court shall place the child with his or her parent or guardian and order that the services shall be provided. If the child cannot be returned to the custody of his or her parent or guardian, the court shall determine if there is a relative who is able and willing to care for the child, and has been assessed pursuant to paragraph (1) of subdivision (d) of Section 309.

(e) Whenever a court orders a child detained, the court shall state the facts on which the decision is based, shall specify why the initial removal was necessary, shall reference the social worker's report or other evidence relied upon to make its determination whether continuance in the home of the parent or legal guardian is contrary to the child's welfare, shall order temporary placement and care of the child to be vested with the county child welfare department pending the hearing held pursuant



to Section 355 or further order of the court, and shall order services to be provided as soon as possible to reunify the child and his or her family if appropriate.

(f) When the child is not released from custody, the court may order that the child shall be placed in the assessed home of a relative, in an emergency shelter or other suitable licensed place, in a place exempt from licensure designated by the juvenile court, or in the assessed home of a nonrelative extended family member as defined in Section 362.7 for a period not to exceed 15 judicial days.

As used in this section, “relative” means an adult who is related to the child by blood, adoption, or affinity within the fifth degree of kinship, including stepparents, stepsiblings, and all relatives whose status is preceded by the words “great,” “great-great,” or “grand,” or the spouse of any of these persons, even if the marriage was terminated by death or dissolution. However, only the following relatives shall be given preferential consideration for placement of the child: an adult who is a grandparent, aunt, uncle, or sibling of the child.

The court shall consider the recommendations of the social worker based on the assessment pursuant to paragraph (1) of subdivision (d) of Section 309 of the relative’s home, including the results of a criminal records check and prior child abuse allegations, if any, prior to ordering that the child be placed with a relative. The court shall order the parent to disclose to the social worker the names, residences, and any known identifying information of any maternal or paternal relatives of the child. The social worker shall initiate the assessment pursuant to Section 361.3 of any relative to be considered for continuing placement.

SEC. 4. Section 361.4 of the Welfare and Institutions Code, as amended by Section 5 of Chapter 918 of the Statutes of 2002, is repealed.

SEC. 5. Section 361.4 of the Welfare and Institutions Code, as amended by Section 6 of Chapter 918 of the Statutes of 2002, is amended to read:

361.4. (a) Prior to placing a child in the home of a relative, or the home of any prospective guardian or other person who is not a licensed or certified foster parent, the county social worker shall visit the home to ascertain the appropriateness of the placement.

(b) Whenever a child may be placed in the home of a relative, or the home of any prospective guardian or other person who is not a licensed or certified foster parent, the court or county social worker placing the child shall cause a state and federal level criminal records check to be conducted by an appropriate governmental agency through the California Law Enforcement Telecommunications System (CLETS) pursuant to Section 16504.5. The criminal records check shall be conducted with regard to all persons over the age of 18 years living in



the home, and on any other person over the age of 18 years, other than professionals providing professional services to the child, known to the placing entity who may have significant contact with the child, including any person who has a familial or intimate relationship with any person living in the home. A criminal records check may be conducted pursuant to this section on any person over the age of 14 years living in the home who the county social worker believes may have a criminal record. Within five judicial days following the criminal records check conducted through the California Law Enforcement Telecommunications System, the social worker shall ensure that a fingerprint clearance check of the relative and any other person whose criminal record was obtained pursuant to this subdivision is initiated through the Department of Justice to ensure the accuracy of the criminal records check conducted through the California Law Enforcement Telecommunications System and shall review the results of any criminal records check to assess the safety of the home. The Department of Justice shall forward fingerprint requests for federal level criminal history information to the Federal Bureau of Investigation pursuant to this section.

(c) Whenever a child may be placed in the home of a relative, or a prospective guardian or other person who is not a licensed or certified foster parent, the county social worker shall cause a check of the Child Abuse Index pursuant to subdivision (a) of Section 11170 of the Penal Code to be requested from the Department of Justice. The Child Abuse Index check shall be conducted on all persons over the age of 18 years living in the home.

(d) (1) If the criminal records check indicates that the person has no criminal record, the county social worker and court may consider the home of the relative, prospective guardian, or other person who is not a licensed or certified foster parent for placement of a child.

(2) If the criminal records check indicates that the person has been convicted of a crime that would preclude licensure under Section 1522 of the Health and Safety Code, the child may not be placed in the home, unless a criminal records exemption has been granted by the county, based on substantial and convincing evidence to support a reasonable belief that the person with the criminal conviction is of such good character as to justify the placement and not present a risk of harm to the child pursuant to paragraph (3).

(3) (A) A county may issue a criminal records exemption only if that county has been granted permission by the Director of Social Services to issue criminal records exemptions. The county may file a request with the Director of Social Services seeking permission for the county to establish a procedure to evaluate and grant appropriate individual



criminal records exemptions for persons described in subdivision (b). The director shall grant or deny the county's request within 14 days of receipt. The county shall evaluate individual criminal records in accordance with the standards and limitations set forth in paragraph (1) of subdivision (g) of Section 1522 of the Health and Safety Code, and in no event shall the county place a child in the home of a person who is ineligible for an exemption under that provision.

(B) The department shall monitor county implementation of the authority to grant an exemption under this paragraph to ensure that the county evaluates individual criminal records and allows or disallows placements according to the standards set forth in paragraph (1) of subdivision (g) of Section 1522 of the Health and Safety Code.

(4) The department shall conduct an evaluation of the implementation of paragraph (3) through random sampling of county exemption decisions.

(5) The State Department of Social Services shall not evaluate or grant criminal record exemption requests for persons described in subdivision (b), unless the exemption request is made by an Indian tribe pursuant to subdivision (f).

(6) If a county has not requested, or has not been granted, permission by the State Department of Social Services to establish a procedure to evaluate and grant criminal records exemptions, the county may not place a child into the home of a person described in subdivision (b) if any person residing in the home has been convicted of a crime other than a minor traffic violation, except as provided in subdivision (f).

(e) Nothing in this section shall preclude a county from conducting a criminal background check that the county is otherwise authorized to conduct using fingerprints.

(f) Upon request from an Indian tribe, the State Department of Social Services shall evaluate an exemption request, if needed, to allow placement into an Indian home that the tribe has designated for placement under the Indian Child Welfare Act (25 U.S.C. Sec. 1901 et seq.) that would otherwise be barred under this section. However, if the county with jurisdiction over the child that is the subject of the tribe's request has established an approved procedure pursuant to paragraph (3) of subdivision (d), the tribe may request that the county evaluate the exemption request. Once a tribe has elected to have the exemption request reviewed by either the State Department of Social Services or the county, the exemption decision may only be made by that entity. Nothing in this subdivision limits the duty of a county social worker to evaluate the home for placement or to gather information needed to evaluate an exemption request.



(g) This section shall remain in effect only until January 1, 2010, and as of that date is repealed, unless a later enacted statute, that is enacted before January 1, 2010, deletes or extends that date.

SEC. 6. Notwithstanding Section 17610 of the Government Code, if the Commission on State Mandates determines that this act contains costs mandated by the state, reimbursement to local agencies and school districts for those costs shall be made pursuant to Part 7 (commencing with Section 17500) of Division 4 of Title 2 of the Government Code. If the statewide cost of the claim for reimbursement does not exceed one million dollars (\$1,000,000), reimbursement shall be made from the State Mandates Claims Fund.

