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## Summary

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Step Up is an initiative to urge California's policy-makers to provide adequate and equitable support to relative foster parents who step up to take care of children who have been placed in state custody due to abuse, neglect, and abandonment.

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## Problem

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While federal and state law require that be given to relative caregivers when finding a home for children in foster care, California, as a matter of policy, provides many relatives who care for children in foster care with significantly less financial support than it provides to children placed with non-relative foster parents.

California's child welfare system uses two funding sources to meet the basic needs of children in foster care. First, the state looks to federal dollars for children that meet federal eligibility requirements. Unfortunately, the majority of California's foster youth (56%) are not federally eligible. For these federally ineligible children, California provides the equivalent amount of support through "state-only" foster care benefits, **except that "state only" foster care is never available to children placed with a relative foster parent.** Children in relative foster care, who do not qualify for federal foster care benefits **do not receive foster care benefits at all.** Instead, they get CalWORKs (TANF). CalWORKs is a public financial assistance benefit generally available to low-income families with children. It is not designed to support children in foster care and offers only a fraction of the financial support provided by foster care benefits. **In fact, the maximum CalWORKs benefit for a single child is equal to just 37% of the poverty line.**

Moreover, because CalWORKs benefits decrease with each additional child in the household and because the benefit amount is not adjusted for a child's special needs, the inequities between CalWORKs and foster care benefits are even starker for relative foster parents caring for sibling groups or children with special needs.

Thus, while relative foster homes are the preferred placement for children in foster care, California's current policies fail to provide adequate and equitable financial support to children in relative foster care making it difficult for those who are most likely to provide safe, stable and permanent homes to step up and care for foster children.

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## Solution

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**Provide foster children placed with relatives support equal to what any other child in a foster home placement receives.**

It is within the state of California's power to change the way it supports foster children who are placed with relatives.

**California is the only state in the country that refuses to ever provide state foster care funding to relative foster parents.** It's time for California to step up and fix this inequity for our foster children.

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## Step Up Member Organizations

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- Alliance for Children's Rights
- Children's Advocacy Institute
- Children Now
- East Bay Children's Law Offices
- John Burton Foundation for Children Without Homes
- Lilliput Children's Services
- Public Counsel
- YMCA Youth and Family Services
- Youth Law Center

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## For More Information

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