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### Summary

Relative caregivers are the backbone of our child welfare system. Relative foster placements tend to lead to more long-term placement stability and offer better connections to the child's community. Yet, California's child welfare system has historically provided inadequate information, training and funding to kinship families. Newly enacted legislation helps provide these families with funding equal to the basic foster care rate, but counties are still prohibited from providing these families with specialized care increments. In addition, relatives have a more difficult time accessing critical support services. **The Step Up Coalition is working hard to implement newly enacted reforms while continuing to pursue additional legislation to achieve full equity.**

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### Problem

California's child welfare system uses three funding sources to meet the basic needs of foster children placed with relatives: federal foster care benefits, the Approved Relative Caregiver Funding Option Program (at each county's option), and CalWORKs (TANF). Relative foster parents receive federal foster care benefits if a child meets the federal rules, but because they are antiquated, at least a third of California foster children are not federally eligible. Non-federally eligible children placed with relatives, can receive ARC benefits equal to the basic foster care rate, but only if the county has opted into the program. For children placed through counties that have not opted into ARC, the child is only eligible for CalWORKs benefits, which provides just a fraction of the amount available through ARC.

This inequitable way of providing financial support to relative caregivers threatens the core of our entire child welfare system. Inequities in funding for children placed with relatives make it more difficult to recruit relatives to care for foster children. And, even when we manage to recruit them, it undermines their ability to do a good job, threatening placement stability and permanency.

While the ARC program is a huge step forward for children and relative caregivers, by limiting the amount of assistance to the basic foster care rate, families caring for youth with specialized needs are still at a significant disadvantage. There are many specialized rates that support non-relatives that are still not available to relatives, including specialized care increments, dual agency rates for foster children with developmental

disabilities who are served by Regional Centers, and infant supplements to support the child of a foster youth who is parenting. Further, while counties are required to apply for foster care benefits on behalf of a foster child, there is no corresponding requirement that counties apply for ARC or CalWORKs benefits for foster children who are placed with relatives. Requiring our relatives to apply for the funding themselves creates an unnecessary barrier to getting the support foster children and relatives need.

Given the ongoing disparities, the Step Up Coalition is working to remove the barriers that prevent families from accessing benefits currently available as well as opening up our specialized care system to support relatives caring for children with heightened needs. Ultimately, the **Step Up Coalition would like to see California adopt a truly child-centered foster care rate system and provide support to children based on their needs.**

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### Solutions

**AB 878 (Eggman):** This will ensure children get financial assistance based on their needs, not based on whether they are related to their caregiver or other arbitrary factors.

**AB 423 (Cooley):** This will make it easier for relatives to access all funding to which the child is currently entitled by requiring counties to determine the child's eligibility and complete any necessary paperwork to initiate.

**AB 403 (Stone):** Sponsored by the California Department of Social Services to carry out the Continuum of Care Reform (CCR) recommendations. The CCR recommendations fail to recommend a child-centered foster rate system, but do make substantial headway in ensuring relatives can gain access to the supportive services they need.

**Budget Request:** We requested \$15 million be allocated in the state budget to provide specialized care increments to all foster families, including the relatives and families certified by an FFA that are currently excluded from our specialized care system.

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### For More Information

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