



September 14, 2009

Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger
California State Capitol
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: AB 295 (Ammiano) Children: Adoption services – REQUEST SIGNATURE

Dear Governor Schwarzenegger,

On behalf of the City and County of San Francisco, I am writing to urge you to sign AB 295, which will help to ensure better life outcomes for young people in foster care. AB 295 would extend the sunset date of a four-county pilot program designed to demonstrate and test strategies for promoting adoptions of older youth in foster care.

Extensive research has shown that youth who emancipate from the foster care system are at high risk for poor outcomes. Recent studies have cited homelessness rates for emancipated youth ranging from 12 to 37 percent, and high school graduation rates of only 55%. The largest national study to date found that by age 21: 18% of emancipated youth had been homeless at least once, 30% of the sample group had been incarcerated between ages 19 and 21, 79% of the males had been arrested at least once in their lives (56% for females), and three-quarters of the females and a third of the males had joined the welfare rolls. Unfortunately however, older foster youth are much less likely to be adopted than their younger counterparts. While more than 40% of foster youth are age 12 or older, only 11% of those adopted in 2006 were over 12.

Under the Older Youth Adoptions Pilot Program (AB 1808, statues of 2006), four counties and one district office received funding to provide pre- and post-adoption services to foster children age 9 and older who have been in care for at least 18 months and are placed in unrelated foster or group homes. As of December 2008, 186 children had realized positive outcome as a result of participating in the initiative and 113 others had a permanency plan in place and were pending a positive outcome. Positive outcomes include achieving permanency through adoption, guardianship or reunification with the biological parent, as well as placement with a relative caregiver or fictive kin and stepping down to a lower level of care.

Due to a delayed roll-out of State funding, participating counties launched their pilot initiatives six to nine months later than planned. As a result, if the current sunset date remains in place the initiatives will not be in operation for the full three years intended under AB 1808 and will not have adequate opportunity to fully demonstrate their potential, thereby undermining the central purpose of the pilot. AB 295 would extend the sunset of the OYA Pilot from December 31, 2009 to June 30, 2010. This would have no state fiscal impact since the bill merely seeks additional time to spend down previously appropriated funds, which were not swept in any iteration of the 2009-10 Budget. If counties are unable to spend down their state appropriations by the current sunset date, an estimated \$723,508 in federal funds will be forfeited. If AB 295 is approved however, this funding will be leveraged and the participating counties estimate that an additional 130 foster children will be served through the pilot.

San Francisco is proud to participate in this important and innovative pilot effort to help improve the lives of children in foster care. AB 295 has enjoyed bipartisan support throughout the legislative process and an earlier version of the bill opposed by the Department of Finance has been substantially amended to remove the objectionable language. I urge you to sign this important piece of legislation.

Sincerely,

Gavin Newsom
Mayor