

# **Assembly Bill 938 (Judiciary Committee)**

## **Dependency Hearings: Improving Outcomes for Foster Children**

### **CONNECTING FOSTER CHILDREN WITH LOVING RELATIVES**

#### **The Problem**

Too often, when children are removed from their parents because of abuse or neglect, they are removed from their families and their communities, even when loving relatives could step in and care for them.

#### **The Bill**

The federal Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act (HR 6893, enacted in 2008) requires that grandparents and other adult relatives be notified when children are removed from their parents and placed in foster care, thus increasing the likelihood that loving relatives will be able to care for them.

AB 938 would implement the federal mandate by requiring that, immediately after a child has been removed from his or her parents due to abuse or neglect, social workers attempt to locate grandparents and other adult relatives (provided these relatives are not involved with family or domestic violence) and inform them of the removal and of options to be involved in the child's life, including kinship care and visitation. The bill would also allow relatives to provide the court with information about the child's needs, thus helping increase the likelihood that the child's rights to safety, permanency and well-being are met.

### **ENSURING FOSTER CHILDREN HAVE A MEANINGFUL VOICE IN COURT**

#### **The Problem**

When children are removed from their parents and placed in foster care, dependency courts step into the role of parent and make life-changing decisions for these children – such as where they will live and with whom, and whether they can see their family again. To ensure that these critical court decisions are well informed, both the children and their parents are generally provided with attorneys to represent them. Unfortunately, the California Blue Ribbon Commission on Children in Foster Care found that too often children and parents may not even meet their attorneys until their hearings. As a result, the attorneys – and, consequently, the court – do not have enough information about the children.

#### **The Bill**

AB 938 would implement the Blue Ribbon Commission's recommendation that all parties to a dependency case, including children and parents, have the opportunity to review reports and meet with their attorneys before all hearings.

#### **Supporters**

Judicial Council (sponsor), California Youth Connection, Youth Law Center

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