

**Introduced by Senator Watson**

February 20, 1998

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An act to add Sections 11469.5 and 11469.6 to the Welfare and Institutions Code, relating to foster care.

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

SB 2091, as introduced, Watson. Foster care: ombudsmen.

Existing law provides for the Aid to Families with Dependent Children-Foster Care program, under which, pursuant to a combination of federal, state, and county funds, aid on behalf of eligible children is paid to foster care providers.

This bill would authorize each county to establish a local foster care ombudsman who would administer a foster care ombudsman program in the county. The bill would also require the State Department of Social Services to regularly, but not less than 4 times per year, bring foster youth together to advise the department as consumers on how to make improvements on issues of concern to foster care youth.

Vote: majority. Appropriation: no. Fiscal committee: yes. State-mandated local program: no.

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

- 1 SECTION 1. Section 11469.5 is added to the Welfare
- 2 and Institutions Code, to read:
- 3 11469.5. (a) Each county may establish a position of
- 4 local foster care ombudsman to administer a foster care
- 5 ombudsman program in that county. The ombudsman

1 program shall serve as a mechanism for children to report  
2 individual complaints with the system.

3 (b) The foster care ombudsman program may be  
4 staffed by older children in the foster care system and  
5 recent graduates of the foster care system. These staff  
6 members shall work with the foster care ombudsman to  
7 offer support, referrals, and advocacy to foster care  
8 children. It is the intent of the Legislature that counties  
9 be encouraged to work with local chapters of the  
10 California Youth Connection to staff the foster care  
11 ombudsman program.

12 (c) Counties may provide training, administrative  
13 support, and guidance to the foster care ombudsman  
14 program. Counties may work with existing programs,  
15 such as court-appointed special advocates, to provide  
16 support and training to the foster care ombudsman  
17 program.

18 (d) Foster care ombudsman program staff may be  
19 trained in the following areas:

20 (1) Child welfare services.

21 (2) The legal system.

22 (3) Dispute and problem resolution techniques.

23 (e) Foster care children shall have the right to contact  
24 the ombudsman program. Foster families and group  
25 homes shall not prevent children from contacting an  
26 ombudsman.

27 (f) The State Department of Social Services shall seek  
28 federal funding under Part E (commencing with Section  
29 670) of Subchapter 4 of Chapter 7 of Title 42 of the United  
30 States Code in order to finance the programs authorized  
31 pursuant to this section.

32 (g) This section shall not supersede any law or  
33 regulation pertaining to community care facilities, as  
34 defined in Section 1502 of the Health and Safety Code.

35 SEC. 2. Section 11469.6 is added to the Welfare and  
36 Institutions Code, to read:

37 11469.6. (a) By July 1, 1999, the director or his or her  
38 representative shall reach out to the foster care youth  
39 community in order to ensure the receipt of input from  
40 foster youth in the development and monitoring of



1 services and programs focused on foster care youth. The  
2 department shall regularly, but not less than four times  
3 each year, bring foster youth together to advise the  
4 department as consumers on how to make improvements  
5 on issues of concern to foster care youth.

6 (b) Each fiscal year the department, with input from  
7 foster care youth, shall set an agenda for the following  
8 fiscal year. This agenda shall be comprised of issues that  
9 the foster care youth feel are important to children in the  
10 foster care system.

11 (c) In the 1999–2000 fiscal year, the foster care youth  
12 shall advise the department on all of the following policy  
13 concerns:

- 14 (1) Family visitation in community care facilities.
- 15 (2) Employment opportunities and job training.
- 16 (3) Assessing the possibility of a group home allowance  
17 policy.
- 18 (4) Discipline systems in group home.
- 19 (5) Creating a homelike environment in group homes.
- 20 (6) Foster care children’s involvement in  
21 extracurricular activities.

22 (d) Any of the issues specified in subdivision (c) not  
23 addressed by the foster care youth in the 1999–2000 fiscal  
24 year shall be put on the agenda for the following fiscal  
25 year.

26 (e) Since the input of foster children is important on  
27 the local level, the Legislature finds that county welfare  
28 directors should be encouraged to create similar advisory  
29 processes for foster care children to advise on issues at the  
30 local level.

