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## AB-898 The Family Urgent Response System. (2025-2026)

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### Assembly Bill No. 898

#### CHAPTER 716

An act to amend Sections 16527 and 16529 of the Welfare and Institutions Code, relating to child welfare.

[ Approved by Governor October 13, 2025. Filed with Secretary of State October 13, 2025. ]

#### LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

AB 898, Bryan. The Family Urgent Response System.

Existing law requires the State Department of Social Services to establish a statewide hotline as the entry point for the Family Urgent Response System, as defined, to respond to calls from caregivers or current or former foster children or youth during moments of instability, as specified. Existing law requires the hotline to include, among other things, referrals to a county-based mobile response system, as specified, for further support and in-person response. Existing law requires the department to collect deidentified, aggregated data, including the number of current and former foster children or youth served through the statewide hotline and the disposition of each call, and requires the department to publish a report on its internet website, as specified.

This bill would instead specify that the statewide hotline shall be the primary entry point for the Family Urgent Response System. The bill would also require the department to collect data on the number of calls received by a county mobile response system, which includes calls received through the statewide hotline and portal.

Existing law also requires county child welfare, probation, and behavioral health agencies, in each county or region of counties, as specified, to establish a joint county-based mobile response system that includes a mobile response and stabilization team for the purpose of providing supportive services to, among other things, address situations of instability, preserve the relationship of the caregiver and the child or youth, and stabilize the situation. Existing law requires county child welfare, probation, and behavioral health agencies, in consultation with other relevant specified entities, to submit a single coordinated plan to the department describing how the county-based mobile response system meets the requirements described above.

This bill would require the plan to also describe and include the date of plan submission and a point of contact for the plan. The bill would require the plan to be updated and submitted on a biennial basis. The bill would also authorize a county-based mobile response system that is not otherwise responding to calls placed through the statewide hotline to utilize mobile response team staff based on local needs, including, among other things, by providing ongoing support to a child, youth, or caregiver who has received mobile response services. The bill would also require a county-based mobile response system that is not otherwise responding to calls placed through the statewide hotline but that chooses to utilize mobile response team staff to prioritize calls placed through the statewide hotline for urgent responses and continue to maintain sufficient staffing to ensure county-based mobile response teams maintain compliance. By increasing the duties of county agencies, this bill would impose a state-mandated local program.

The California Constitution requires the state to reimburse local agencies and school districts for certain costs mandated by the state. Statutory provisions establish procedures for making that reimbursement.

This bill would provide that, if the Commission on State Mandates determines that the bill contains costs mandated by the state, reimbursement for those costs shall be made pursuant to the statutory provisions noted above.

Vote: majority Appropriation: no Fiscal Committee: yes Local Program: yes

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## THE PEOPLE OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA DO ENACT AS FOLLOWS:

**SECTION 1.** Section 16527 of the Welfare and Institutions Code is amended to read:

**16527.** (a) The department shall establish a statewide hotline as the primary entry point for the Family Urgent Response System, which shall be available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, to respond to calls from a caregiver or current or former foster child or youth during moments of instability. Both of the following shall be available through this hotline:

(1) Hotline workers who are trained in techniques for deescalation and conflict resolution telephone response specifically for children or youth impacted by trauma.

(2) Referrals to a county-based mobile response system, established pursuant to Section 16529, for further support and in-person response. Referrals shall occur as follows:

(A) A warm handoff whereby the hotline worker establishes direct and live connection through a three-way call that includes the caregiver, child or youth, and county contact. The caregiver, child, or youth may decline the three-way contact with the county contact if they feel their situation has been resolved at the time of the call.

(B) If a direct communication cannot be established pursuant to subparagraph (A), a referral directly to the community- or county-based service and a followup call to ensure that a connection to the caregiver, child, or youth occurs.

(C) The hotline worker shall contact the caregiver and the child or youth within 24 hours after the initial call required under subparagraph (A) or (B) to offer additional support, if needed.

(b) The statewide hotline shall maintain contact information for all county-based mobile response systems, based on information provided by counties, for referrals to local services, including, but not limited to, county-based mobile response and stabilization teams.

(c) The department shall ensure that deidentified, aggregated data are collected regarding individuals served through the statewide hotline and county-based mobile response systems and shall publish a report on the department's internet website by January 1, 2022, and annually by January 1 thereafter, in consultation with stakeholders, including, but not limited to, the County Welfare Directors Association of California, the Chief Probation Officers of California, and the County Behavioral Health Directors Association of California. The data shall be collected using automated procedures or other matching methods mutually agreed upon by the state and county agencies, including, but not limited to, the statewide child welfare automation management system, and shall include all of the following information:

(1) The number of caregivers served through the hotline, separated by placement type and status as a current or former foster caregiver.

(2) The number of current and former foster children or youth served through the hotline, separated by county agency type, current or former foster care status, age, gender, race, and whether the call was made by the caregiver or the child or youth.

(3) The disposition of each call, including, but not limited to, whether mobile response and stabilization services were provided or a referral was made to other services.

(4) County-based outcome data, including, but not limited to, placement stability, return into foster care, movement from child welfare to juvenile justice, and timeliness to permanency.

(5) The number of calls received by a county-based mobile response system, including calls received through the statewide hotline and portal.

(d) The department may meet the requirements of this section through contract with an entity with demonstrated experience in working with populations of children or youth who have suffered trauma and with capacity to provide a 24-hour-a-day, seven-day-a-week response that includes mediation, relationship preservation for the caregiver and the child or youth, and a family-centered and developmentally appropriate approach with the caregiver and the child or youth.

(e) The department, in consultation with stakeholders, including current and former foster youth and caregivers, shall do all of the following:

(1) Develop methods and materials for informing all caregivers and current or former foster children or youth about the statewide hotline, including a dissemination plan for those materials, which shall include, at a minimum, making those materials publicly available through the department's internet website.

(2) Establish protocols for triage and response.

(3) Establish minimum education and training requirements for hotline workers.

(4) Consider expanding the statewide hotline to include communication through electronic means, including, but not limited to, text messaging or email.

(f) (1) The statewide hotline shall be operational no sooner than January 1, 2021, and on the same date as the county mobile response system created pursuant to this chapter.

(2) Notwithstanding paragraph (1), the statewide hotline may operate sooner than January 1, 2021, or prior to the date that each county has created a county mobile response system, upon notification from each county to the department that the county satisfies one of the following requirements:

(A) Has established a county mobile response system created pursuant to this chapter.

(B) Has an alternative method to accept and respond to referrals from the statewide hotline pending the establishment of the county mobile response system.

(g) The department shall assist, as needed, the State Department of Health Care Services in exercising its authority pursuant to subdivision (b) of Section 16528.

**SEC. 2.** Section 16529 of the Welfare and Institutions Code is amended to read:

**16529.** (a) County child welfare, probation, and behavioral health agencies, in each county or region of counties as specified in subdivision (f), shall establish a joint county-based mobile response system that includes a mobile response and stabilization team for the purpose of providing supportive services to address situations of instability, preserve the relationship of the caregiver and the child or youth, develop healthy conflict resolution and relationship skills, promote healing as a family, and stabilize the situation.

(b) In each county or region of counties, the county child welfare, probation, and behavioral health agencies, in consultation with other relevant county agencies, tribal representatives, caregivers, and current or former foster children or youth, shall submit a single, coordinated plan to the department that describes how the county-based mobile response system shall meet the requirements described in subdivision (c). This plan shall be updated and submitted on a biennial basis. The plan shall also describe and include all of the following:

(1) How the county, or region of counties, will track and monitor calls.

(2) Data collection efforts, consistent with guidance provided by the department, including, at a minimum, collection of data necessary for the report required pursuant to subdivision (c) of Section 16527.

(3) Transitions from mobile response and stabilization services to ongoing services.

(4) A process for identifying if the child or youth has an existing child and family team for coordinating with the child and family team to address the instability, and a plan for ongoing care to support that relationship in a trusting and healing environment.

(5) A process and criteria for determining response.

(6) The composition of the responders, including efforts to include peer partners and those with lived experience in the response team, whenever possible.

(7) Both existing and new services that will be used to support the mobile response and stabilization services. County behavioral health departments that operate mobile crisis units may share resources between mobile crisis units and the mobile response system required pursuant to this chapter, at their discretion.

(8) Response protocols for the child or youth in family-based and congregate care settings based on guidelines developed by the department, in consultation with stakeholders, pursuant to Section 16528. The response protocols shall ensure protections for children and youth to prevent placements into congregate care settings, psychiatric institutions, and hospital settings.

(9) A process for identifying whether the child or youth has an existing behavioral health treatment plan and a placement preservation strategy, as described in Section 16010.7, and for coordinating response and services consistent with the plan and strategy.

(10) A plan for the mobile response and stabilization team to provide supportive services in the least intrusive and most child, youth, and family friendly manner, such that mobile response and stabilization teams do not trigger further trauma to the child or youth.

(11) Date of plan submission.

(12) Point-of-contact information for the plan, including name, telephone number, and email address.

(c) A county-based mobile response system shall include all of the following:

(1) Phone response at the county level that facilitates entry of the caregivers and current or former foster children or youth into mobile response services.

(2) A process for determining when a mobile response and stabilization team will be sent, or when other services will be used, based on the urgent and critical needs of the caregiver, child, or youth.

(3) A mobile response and stabilization team available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

(4) Ability to provide immediate, in-person, face-to-face response preferably within 1 hour, but not to exceed 3 hours in extenuating circumstances for urgent needs, or same-day response within 24 hours for nonurgent situations.

(5) Utilization of individuals with specialized training in trauma of children or youth and the foster care system on the mobile response and stabilization team. Efforts should be made to include peer partners and those with lived experience in the response team, whenever possible.

(6) Provision of in-home deescalation, stabilization, and support services and supports, including all of the following:

(A) Establishing in-person, face-to-face contact with the child or youth and caregiver.

(B) Identifying the underlying causes of, and precursors to, the situation that led to the instability.

(C) Identifying the caregiver interventions attempted.

(D) Observing the child and caregiver interaction.

(E) Diffusing the immediate situation.

(F) Coaching and working with the caregiver and the child or youth in order to preserve the family unit and maintain the current living situation or create a healthy transition plan, if necessary.

(G) Establishing connections to other county- or community-based supports and services to ensure continuity of care, including, but not limited to, linkage to additional trauma-informed and culturally and linguistically responsive family supportive services and youth and family wellness resources.

(H) Following up after the initial face-to-face response, for up to 72 hours, to determine if additional supports or services are needed.

(I) Identifying any additional support or ongoing stabilization needs for the family and making a plan for, or referral to, appropriate youth and family supportive services within the county.

(7) A process for communicating with the county of jurisdiction and the county behavioral health agency, as applicable, regarding the service needs of the child or youth and caregiver provided that the child or youth is currently under the jurisdiction of either the county child welfare or the probation system.

(d) County-based mobile response systems may be temporarily adapted to address circumstances associated with COVID-19, consistent with the Governor's Proclamation of a State of Emergency, issued on March 4, 2020.

(e) (1) A county-based mobile response system that is not otherwise responding to calls placed through the statewide hotline may utilize mobile response team staff based on local needs, including, but not limited to, any of the following:

(A) Engaging in in-person education and outreach.

(B) Responding to local child, youth, or caregiver requests for support.

(C) Providing ongoing support to a child, youth, or caregiver who has received mobile response services.

(D) Responding to calls from children and families during a hotline investigation or who are receiving family preservation or voluntary or court-ordered family maintenance services.

(2) If a county-based mobile response system that is not otherwise responding to calls placed through the statewide hotline chooses to utilize mobile response team staff pursuant to paragraph (1), the county-based mobile response system shall prioritize calls placed through the statewide hotline for urgent responses and shall continue to maintain sufficient staffing to ensure county-based mobile response teams maintain compliance with all requirements set forth in subdivision (c).

(f) (1) Each county shall establish a mobile response system no sooner than January 1, 2021, and on the same date as the statewide hotline created under this chapter.

(2) Notwithstanding paragraph (1), a county may establish a mobile response system, or an alternative method to accept and respond to referrals from the statewide hotline, pending the establishment of the county mobile response system, prior to January 1, 2021, in order to facilitate the early operation of the statewide hotline.

(3) The county agencies described in subdivisions (a) and (b) may implement this section on a per-county basis or by collaborating with other counties to establish regional, cross-county mobile response systems. For counties implementing this section pursuant to a regional approach, a single plan, as described in subdivision (b), signed by all agency representatives, shall be submitted to the department and a lead county shall be identified.

(4) Funds expended pursuant to this act shall be used to supplement, and not supplant, other existing funding for mobile response services described in this chapter.

(5) A county or region of counties may receive an extension, not to exceed six months, to implement a mobile response system after January 1, 2021, upon submission of a written request, in a manner to be prescribed by the department, that includes a demonstration of actions to implement, progress towards implementation, and the county's alternative method to accept and respond to referrals from the statewide hotline pending the establishment of the county mobile response system.

(g) The creation and implementation of the Family Urgent Response System shall not infringe on entitlements or services provided pursuant to Title IV-E of the federal Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. Sec. 670 et seq.) or as defined in the federal Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnosis and Treatment services (42 U.S.C. Sec. 1396d(r)).

(h) The department, in collaboration with the County Welfare Directors Association of California, the County Behavioral Health Directors Association of California, and the Chief Probation Officers of California, on an annual basis beginning on January 1, 2022, shall assess utilization and workload associated with implementation of the statewide hotline and mobile response and provide an update to the Legislature during budget hearings.

**SEC. 3.** If the Commission on State Mandates determines that this act contains costs mandated by the state, reimbursement to local agencies and school districts for those costs shall be made pursuant to Part 7 (commencing with Section 17500) of Division 4 of Title 2 of the Government Code.