April 20, 2015

The Honorable Kansen Chu, Chair
Human Services Committee
State Capitol
Sacramento, California 95814

RE: AB 403 (Stone) **SUPPORT**

Dear Assemblymember Chu,

On behalf of the accredited, private nonprofit member agencies of the California Alliance of Child and Family Services (Alliance), I am writing in support of AB 403 (Stone) that would implement the recommendations of the Department of Social Services (CDSS) related to the Continuum of Care Reform (CCR).

Alliance member agencies provide a wide variety of care, support, services and treatment to vulnerable children, youth and families statewide, including FFA, group home, adoption, specialty mental health, wraparound, family preservation, and kinship support services among others. The Alliance and representatives of its member agencies were integrally involved in the CCR stakeholder discussions that informed the recommendations reflected in this bill. The Alliance in collaboration with the County Welfare Directors Association proposed a program model to stakeholders which became foundational for much of the CCR framework.

Accordingly, we are in complete agreement with the underlying premises and basic tenets of AB 403: that children should be raised in families, not institutional settings, and that residential care should be used for those children and youth whose needs for care and supervision in the short term cannot be met adequately in home-based family settings.

The bill would reduce counties' reliance on group care by eliminating RCL 1-9 group homes and replacing them with home-based family care. It would transform all remaining RCL 10-14 group homes into a single category of Short-Term Residential Treatment Centers in which children and youth would live for the least amount of time necessary to safely return them to family living situations, then follow them into the community, wrapping needed services and support around the young people and their families.

Shrinking the number of children and youth in group care will require an unprecedented effort to retain, recruit and approve qualified, compassionate caregivers. To that end, CCR would use Foster Family Agencies (FFAs) to provide needed support and services to young people and their caregivers regardless of with whom children and youth are living, or where they are in the progression of the foster care system: pre-placement, placement, and post-permanency.

CCR reflects the first time California has attempted to design its foster care system from the ground up and we believe it represents a once in a generation opportunity to get foster care right. Bold in

scope, it draws on over 20 years of successful experimentation and evolution in child welfare practice coupled with community-based mental health services, including the creation of FFAs, family preservation services, Intensive Treatment Foster Care, Therapeutic Behavioral Services, kinship support services programs, wraparound and use of child and family teaming, Residentially-Based Services reform, special needs adoption, differential response, the California Partners for Permanency projects, Intensive Care Coordination, Intensive Home-based Services, and recent efforts to establish Therapeutic Foster Care and exemplary core practice models.

AB 403 offers a framework for reform and would provide CDSS with the authority to flesh out the details. While the Alliance has many questions and some concerns with those details, the author and CDSS have been extremely responsive, and we are certain that we can work with them and other stakeholders to come to agreement on the specifics of implementation.

For these reasons, the Alliance is pleased to support AB 403 (Stone) and encourages its passage out of the Assembly Human Services Committee.

Sincerely,

Carroll Schroeder, MS
Executive Director