[Letterhead]

[Date]

Assemblymember Reginald B. Jones-Sawyer, Sr. (Chair)

Honorable Members, Assembly Budget Subcommittee No. 5

State Capitol

Sacramento, CA 95814

Fax: (916) 319-2199

Dear Honorable Members,

I am writing to urge your support of a budget proposal to ensure that California’s foster children are provided with high quality legal representation.

[insert organization’s background and/or any specific stories or cases to emphasize the need for this budget item]

For a foster child struggling to cope with the trauma of having been abused or neglected, meaningful access to a lawyer is critical. They give a voice to the state’s most vulnerable youth, while helping them to understand and navigate a complex and overwhelming system. They are mandated by law to serve as zealous advocates at each hearing, while also ascertaining and bringing to the court’s attention all issues regarding the child’s well-being. A child’s attorney is the one to secure court orders for sibling visitation, placement in a relative’s home, counseling when a child has emotional problems, tutoring for a child struggling in school, or review of psychotropic medications when there is concern of overmedication.

Yet, despite their vital role, court appointed dependency counsel throughout the state remain severely underfunded. A 2008 study conducted in California by the American Humane Society determined that the optimal caseload for a dependency attorney is 77 clients, while the maximum recommended caseload is 188 clients (with the help of a social work investigator). Under the current budget allocation, attorneys in 32 counties are not sufficiently funded to meet the maximum. 15 counties are so under-resourced that caseloads are *more than double* 188 clients.

Without a reasonable caseload, even the most dedicated and highly skilled attorneys cannot provide the kind of advocacy that foster children need. Child welfare advocates and lawmakers have worked hard to improve outcomes for foster youth. However, unless dependency attorneys have the time and resources to enforce these statutes, these important new laws are rendered meaningless.

California’s abused and neglected children deserve better. A $33.1 million increase in the allocation for court appointed counsel will allow every county to meet the recommended maximum of 188 clients per lawyer.

February 7, 2014

We urge the committee to ensure that this new funding is realized so that foster children are given a voice and the tools they need to succeed.

Sincerely,

[Name

Address

Contact Information]