



REQUEST FOR REINSTATEMENT OF MILEAGE REIMBURSEMENT FOR PARENT CHILD VISITATION SERVICES

HISTORY:

When children are in foster care, the purpose of parent/child visitation is to maintain relationships and attachment, reduce a child's sense of abandonment, and preserve the sense of belonging to a family and community. Visitation is a critical, court ordered service whose value is recognized by courts, CA caseworkers, and attorneys. Providers ensure that children get safely from foster homes, child care or school to visitation locations. CA currently uses parent child visitation services for 60 percent of the children in foster care.

Children in foster care need to have regular contact with their parent(s) and siblings, as these relationships are the foundation to their development. When children lose family connections, they also lose family history, medical history and cultural information. Visitation also facilitates permanency planning, promotes timely reunification, and helps establish alternative permanency plans if needed.

CA currently does not reimburse mileage for transporting children to visits until after a provider has driven 60 miles; all mileage used to be paid. Visitation providers frequently travel great distances between locations. Many quality private agencies have had to abandon this contract, and those agencies remaining are operating at a significant loss.

Due to these factors, Parent Child Visitation Services contractors and Child Placing Agencies providing visitation are limited in how well they can serve families. It is important for family members to have contact as soon as possible after a placement, but with the current reimbursement system, providers have trouble maintaining enough staff to respond immediately to referrals. The reimbursement rate also limits agencies' ability to transport longer distances or to provide transportation-only for sibling visits and unsupervised visits. Providers serving rural areas find it especially difficult, and children living in these areas suffer by not having adequate resources to maintain family connections.

With the reinstatement of full mileage reimbursement for the CPA and PCV contracts, providers would be able to accept referrals for unsupervised visitation and for transportation of family members regardless of where they live. Additionally, providers would experience less staff turnover and would be able to promptly schedule referral requests.

REQUEST:

Child Placing Agencies and agencies with Parent Child Visitation contracts are asking the legislature to invest resources in foster children and their families by reinstating full mileage reimbursement for visitation services. This will assure that the CA can meet the federal Children's Bureau requirement for equal access to services regardless of where families live.

CA supports this position in a Policy Level Decision Package, *Reimbursing Contractors for Travel*. CA can reduce costs by moving families toward reunification and permanence in a timely manner.

CA estimates that in 2016 2,987 child welfare cases were authorized use of contracted visitation services. Providers traveled an estimated 234,822 miles each month that were not eligible for reimbursement. CA estimates that if providers received full mileage reimbursement at the state rate, the additional annual cost would be \$1,522,000.