Policy At A Glance:

Vocational Education: Youth Caregivers (AB 2324)

With November being National Family Caregivers Month, this brief provides an overview of AB 2324, a recently chaptered California law on youth caregivers, along with the effects of caregiving on youth caregivers.

Introduction

November is National Family Caregivers Month established to recognize and honor millions of unpaid family caregivers in the United States.[1] Often the primary source of support for older adults and people with disabilities or chronic illnesses, family caregivers provide unpaid care that is valued at over $470 billion.[1] Family caregivers play various roles, including assistance with daily activities; provision of medical care such as medication administration; and navigation of complex health care and social services systems on behalf of their care recipients.[2]

Although most family caregivers are adults, there is a significant subset of family caregivers that are youth. For example, more than 5.4 million children and adolescents under age 18 provide care for family members nationally.[3] In California, there are estimated to be about 200,000 to 400,000 youth caregivers that help care for family members with chronic illnesses, disabilities, or aging-related needs.[4]

As such, California's Assemblymember Jeff Gonzalez (R-Indio) introduced AB 2324 to support youth caregivers in the state and expand career pathways in caregiving, and the bill received bipartisan support, passing out of the Legislature unanimously.[5] It was signed by the Governor and became law on July 16 of this year. This brief provides an overview of AB 2324 and the effects of caregiving faced by youth caregivers.

Relevant Dates for AB 2324[5]

02/12/2026	Introduced in the CA State Assembly
04/16/2026	Amended and passed out of the Assembly Committee on Education
05/21/2026	Passed in the California State Assembly
07/02/2026	Passed in the California State Senate
07/16/2026	Signed into law by Governor Gavin Newsom and chaptered as law

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Effects of Caregiving on Youth Caregivers

Family caregivers in general face various psychological, physical, social and economic effects of caregiving that are both positive and negative.[6-8] Positive effects include developing empathy, patience, and resilience, as well as responsibility, time management, and problem-solving skills.[6] Caregiving can also strengthen family relationships and influence career choices.[7] Negative effects include psychological effects which can range from stress to depression and/or anxiety; physical effects such as caregiving-related injuries (e.g., musculoskeletal injuries such as back ache, muscle strain, and contusions while lifting, bathing, or repositioning the care recipient); social effects such as reduced time and energy for maintaining social relationships; and economic effects such as decreased income and/or increased expenses.[6-8]

Youth caregivers experience these same effects and have the added effect on their schooling. For example, a recent systematic review found that young carers often experience reduced school engagement, including higher absenteeism, limited study time, and lower participation in school activities.[9] Effects on academic attainment were mixed: while several studies reported lower grades among young caregivers (especially those with high-intensity or multi-recipient caring roles), others found no significant differences. Educational impacts varied according to caregiving intensity, carer demographics, socioeconomic disadvantage, and the care recipient's condition, with caring for someone with mental illness or substance use issues linked to poorer outcomes.[9] Currently, the federal government and schools do not formally acknowledge or support caregiving youth, leaving them at higher risk for academic, social, and emotional challenges.[10]

Global Model: United Kingdom

The United Kingdom has been especially protective of youth caregivers through their inclusion in national caregiving legislation, including special provisions under the Children and Family Act.[10] Additionally, the Children Act 1989, The Care Act 2014 and the Health and Care Act 2022 include the right for every "young carer" to have a needs assessment to work out what support they need.[11,12] The rights of these "young carers" are recognized and upheld to varying degrees by national governments, caregiving advocacy groups, health care services, and schools. Such model of institutional recognition contrasts with current US practices, where federal programs such as the National Family Caregiver Support Program exclude family caregivers who are under the age of 18 from receiving supports given to those over 18.[10]



Details and Provisions of AB 2324

The "Why"

Inspired by his family's personal experience caring for his son RJ who has severe disabilities, Assemblyman Jeff Gonzalez (R-Indio) introduced AB 2324 to consider the needs of youth caregivers.[4] According to the bill text, there are about 4.4 million Californians providing unpaid care to family members with a monetary value of $81 billion.[13] AB 2324 "acknowledges that while caregiving can be personally satisfying, culturally necessary, and a natural part of the human condition, it can also be emotionally, physically, and financially challenging … [and that] while some youth caregivers thrive with a sense of purpose and advanced maturity, many others experience isolation from peers, depression, and resentment."[13] Furthermore, the bill points out that youth caregivers represent 22 percent of the nation's high school dropouts, making it difficult for them to get a job or go to college.[13] In addition, there is a racial disparity, with youth caregivers from non-White households being disproportionately impacted, experiencing heavier workloads and increased anxiety, mood swings, and feeling of helplessness.[13] Furthermore, AB 2324 acknowledges that California is experiencing a workforce shortage in direct support professionals in health and human services and is not adequately keeping pace with the needs of aging adults or people with disabilities.[13]

The "Who"

AB 2324 defines a youth caregiver as "a child or youth of an age typical of a pupil in any of grades 9 to 12, inclusive, who provides help or care to any person who has an ongoing health problem or chronic illness, or who is elderly, frail, disabled, or mentally ill."[13]

The "What"

To better support California's youth caregivers, AB 2324 requires the State Department of Education to consider adding content on the role of youth caregivers within the Personal Care and Services career pathway at the next revision of the California Career Technical Education Model Curriculum Standards.[13]

Furthermore, by July 1, 2028, the Department of Education must also issue implementation guidance that may include the following:[13]

- Skills specific to Personal Care and Services occupations, including in-home caregiving for youth caregivers supporting household family members
- Training and course content related to direct support work and the care of older adults and people with mental health conditions or disabilities
- Consideration of the risks youth caregivers may face regarding mental and emotional health, social development, education, and physical health, along with referrals for support services
- A work-based learning strategy that may treat the family home as a viable learning location
- Eligibility for youth caregivers to earn credit through existing work experience education programs for care provided in the family home

While AB 2324 does not automatically award school credit or create a comprehensive system of services for youth caregivers, it formally places them within state education policy, recognizing their special needs.

Conclusion

Youth caregivers are often under-recognized and poorly supported in our country, with federal policies and programs lacking in provisions that include their needs and rights. By recognizing and formally placing youth caregivers within state education policy, AB 2324 takes an important step toward addressing their needs—at least in California. Ultimately, federal policies and existing social programs that support family caregivers should be updated to include young people under age 18. Also, national surveys such as the Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS) should include questions about caregiving to better understand the magnitude of youth caregiving and its effects. Finally, schools, medical providers, and social workers should be educated to increase awareness about caregiving youth and their potential needs so that these young caregivers can be locally supported to improve their academic, physical, emotional and social wellbeing.



Did you know?

In one meta-analysis of 116 studies, Hispanic and Asian American caregivers reported more depression than their white, non-Hispanic counterparts while African American caregivers had lower levels of burden and depression than non-Hispanic white caregivers.[6]

References

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Institute for Health Policy and Leadership

11209 Anderson Street
Loma Linda, CA 92354
Phone: 909-558-7022
Fax: 909-558-5638
www.IHPL.llu.edu

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Please contact the Institute for Health Policy & Leadership (ihpl@llu.edu).