

Solano County Probation Department

Youth Missing from Foster Care Placement Protocol

I. Purpose

Pursuant to All County Letter 25-67 released September 2025, this protocol establishes a consistent, trauma-informed response when a youth under juvenile probation supervision is missing from foster care placement. It outlines required reporting, locating efforts, documentation, Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC) -related actions, and post-return responsibilities.

II. Definitions

Youth are considered missing from care “when the whereabouts of a child subject to an order of foster care placement are unknown to the county probation agency...or when the probation department has located a child subject to an order of foster care placement in a location not approved by the court that may pose a risk to the child...” (WIC section 16501.35 (c) (1)).

Note: The term “AWOL” is not a term to be used when discussing a youth missing from care (although the statewide database uses AWOL when documenting a youth missing from care in the system). The term AWOL is not in accordance with trauma informed language.

In the case of a non-minor dependent (NMD), this definition shall only apply if based on the totality of the circumstances and the county probation department suspects the non-minor dependent did not voluntarily leave foster care or is at risk of substantial harm (WIC section 16501.35(c)(2)).

It is important to identify youth who are missing from care, as they are at risk of human trafficking (including sexual/labor exploitation), injury, and death. There are steps to follow to ensure the probation officer (PO) is making reasonable efforts to locate the youth missing from care and meeting the reporting requirements.

The Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act (PL 113-183) (2014) requires **title IV-E agencies** to implement protocols to locate any youth who has gone missing from foster care, determine the factors that led to the youth being missing from care, and to the extent possible, address those factors in subsequent placements, and determine the youth’s experiences while missing from care, including whether the youth is a human trafficking victim. The agency must provide appropriate services to youth at risk of or victimized by human trafficking.

Missing From Care (AB 2108): A youth is missing when their whereabouts are unknown, or They are found in an unapproved or unsafe location. Applies to non-minor dependents (NMD) only when the absence is involuntary or poses risk of harm.

III. Authority

WIC §16501.35 – Requirements for locating missing youth and assessing factors and experiences while missing.

- Preventing Sex Trafficking & Strengthening Families Act (PL 113-183).
- AB 2108 – Updated noticing requirements within 24 hours.
- Penal Code §14211 – Be On the Look-Out (BOLO) and Department of Justice/National Crime Information Center (DOJ/NCIC) entry required within 2 hours.

IV. Roles & Responsibilities

- Probation Officer (PO): Leads locating efforts, ensures all required reports and notices are completed, coordinates with involved agencies, and submits bench warrant requests.
- PO Supervisor: Provides oversight, approves warrant requests, and ensures timelines are followed.
- Placement Providers: Notify PO immediately when youth is AWOL, conduct initial area searches, provide relevant information, and make the initial missing person report.
- Law Enforcement (LE): Takes missing person report, completes BOLO, and enters youth into DOJ/NCIC.
- National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC): Receives required reports for youth missing from care who are at risk of or involved in CSEC.

V. Procedure

A. Immediate Actions (0–2 Hours)

When a PO is notified by a caregiver/provider or becomes aware a youth is missing from care the PO must complete the following critical/time sensitive tasks below.

Note: At all times throughout the procedure, PO to use and/or engage in harm-reduction communication in outreach to youth.

1. PO will contact the caregiver/provider and obtain details regarding where the youth was last seen (placement, school, etc.); time the youth was last seen; whether there was any known reason for the youth leaving care, and if it is known where the youth may be located. Document findings in eProbation.
2. PO will advise the caregiver/provider to file a Missing Person's Report (MPR) with their local police department/LE. It is important the caregiver/provider obtains a report number from LE and provide it to the PO. If the caregiver/provider does not file a MPR it is the responsibility of the PO to file a MPR. This must be completed immediately but no later than 24 hours of receiving information the youth is missing from care. LE to ensure BOLO and DOJ/NCIC entry.

Note: In the case of a tribal youth, any tribal LE agency for the youth's Tribe must be notified in addition to local LE. It is recommended if the youth is placed outside of the jurisdictional county, that LE should also be notified in the jurisdictional county, where the parent(s), legal guardian(s) or Tribal custodian reside.

B. Within 24 Hours

Per WIC Section 16501.35: Notification shall be done immediately but no later than 24 hours of receiving information the youth/NMD is missing from care. PO will provide the required notifications (email is preferred where applicable):

1. To the missing youth's or NMD's parents/legal guardians/Tribal Custodians, and the youth's Tribe in the case of a Tribal youth. PO will advise parents that a MPR has been made (no need to provide report number). PO will ask the parents if the youth has contacted them or if they know where the youth might be. PO will inform the parents to contact the PO immediately if they hear from the youth.
2. To the youth's or NMD's attorney appointed pursuant to WIC section 317(c) or WIC section 634.
3. To the youth's or NMD's Court-Appointed Special Advocate (CASA), if one has been appointed.
4. To any known sibling of the youth or NMD who is 10 years of age or older that are also in foster care. **If such notice would not be contrary to the safety and well-being of that sibling. Notice to siblings shall be provided in a trauma-informed manner.*
5. If youth is at risk of or involved in CSEC, PO contacts National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC) (1-800-843-5678) immediately and no later than 24 hours. Provide required information including photo, physical description, endangerment info, and tribal status.
6. To the Probation supervisor, manager, and juvenile division chief.

C. Additional Tasks

1. PO maintains regular communication with NCMEC and LE per PC §11166(j)(3)(C), and tribal LE/leadership in the case of an Indian child.[T
2. PO considers bench warrant and submits request as appropriate, (typically no later than 72 hours).
3. Once bench warrant is issued, stop payment to provider and document in both eProbation and Child Welfare Services (CWS) case management platforms that youth is absent from care with active bench warrant (see Attachment A for CWS/Case Management System (CMS) instructions).

D. Active Efforts

ACL 24-18, released in March 2024, provides guidance to county placing agencies regarding the requirements to make affirmative, active, thorough, and timely efforts ("active efforts") intended to maintain or reunite a tribal youth with their family in Indian child custody proceedings. As noted in WIC section 224.1(f)(3), "identifying, notifying, and inviting representatives of the Indian child's Tribe to participate in providing support and services to the Indian child's family and in family team meetings, permanency planning, and resolution of placement issues," is a requirement. When a child is missing from care, it is the placing agency's responsibility to notify and work collaboratively with the child's Tribe. This includes notifying the Tribe immediately, (or no later than 24 hours after the agency has received information that the youth is missing from placement), collaborating with the tribal representative on efforts to locate the youth, and ensuring that the Tribe is regularly updated regarding the youth's status, particularly when the youth has been located, to determine the most appropriate placement, if a placement change is necessary. Engagement with the Tribe may provide additional information to assist in locating the youth. The active efforts to meet such requirements must also be documented in the child's case record, per ACL 24-18.

E. Ongoing and Reasonable Efforts

1. PO to continue diligent locating efforts (at least monthly) including calls, field visits, and following leads.
2. PO to maintain monthly communication with LE, NCMEC, and if youth is indigenous, maintain active efforts and contact with Tribal Liaison.
3. PO to document all efforts and communications in eProbation.

F. Placement Preservation Efforts

1. Mandatory Support & Stabilization (AB 2247):

Before a placement change is even considered, the social worker/probation officer must:

- Engage the CFT: You are legally required to convene a Child and Family Team (CFT) meeting to identify necessary services to preserve the placement.
- Document Efforts: You must document all specific services provided to the caregiver/provider and youth to prevent the move (e.g., intensive home-based services, mental health support).

2. The 14-Day Written Notice (ACL 19-26):

If the CFT determines a move is unavoidable, a 14-day formal notice must be issued.

- Recipients: The youth (10+ years old), current caregiver/provider, youth's attorney, and CASA.
- Content: Must state the reason for the move and the date it will occur.

3. The "Placement Preservation Strategy:

AB 2247 requires that if a move is proposed, the team must first develop a strategy to keep the child where they are.

- Alternatives: The team must explore if a change in services or a temporary respite could resolve the issue.
- Youth Voice: The youth's preference regarding staying or moving must be given significant weight during this process.

4. Emergency Exceptions:

The 14-day notice and prior CFT requirement may be bypassed only if:

- Imminent Danger: There is a documented risk to the physical health or safety of the youth or others.
- Court Mandate: A court order specifically directs an immediate move.

5. Objection and Dispute Resolution:

- Grievance: If the youth or their attorney objects to the move, a review process is triggered and done through a Child Family Team (CFT) meeting.
- Status Quo: Unless there is a safety emergency, the youth should remain in their current placement until the objection is resolved.

Quick Checklist for Compliance

Requirement	Action Item
Stability First	Have we held a CFT to try and save this placement?
Notice	Has the 14-day written notice been sent to all parties (including the attorney)?
Documentation	Does the case file show exactly what services were offered to prevent the move?
Safety	If moving in under 14 days, is the "imminent danger" clearly documented?

VI. When Youth is Located/Returns

1. Coordinate safe return to custody due to bench warrant or voluntary return hearing.
2. Notify NCMEC and LE that the youth has been located.
3. Ensure a health and safety check is completed.
4. Notify all local parties, family, Tribe, youth siblings, and provider of youth's return.
5. Conduct a post-return interview to understand factors leading to absence and experiences while missing. The debriefing interview should ideally be conducted by an adult of the youth's choosing, whenever possible, by using Attachment B – Return From Missing Placement Interview form. However, when the interview is not conducted by the PO, all information obtained should be shared with the PO, to ensure information collected is consistent with the guidance provided in ACIN I-13-17.
6. Update case plan and schedule a Child and Family Team (CFT) meeting within 30 days.

VII. Harm-Reduction Principles

A harm reduction approach is encouraged to be utilized in both preventing and mitigating risks associated when a youth is missing from care. Honest discussion is important and should include legitimate reasons why the youth should stay in their placement, as well as the understanding and acknowledgment a youth may decide to leave regardless. Discussions will include how a youth can maintain their own safety while missing from care. This does not mean leaving placement is encouraged or condoned, and instead meets the youth where they are, encourages openness, and builds trust.