



CHILD WELFARE

Ensure each child in Pennsylvania has the opportunity to grow up in a home where they are safe and protected from abuse and neglect. For those children who are victims of trauma, the system should ensure that services are provided to heal and preserve the family and if out-of-home care is necessary, that placement is in a family-based setting, preferably kin. Community-based interventions should be sought to prevent the need for unnecessary out-of-home removal, expedite reunification, and ensure permanency for every child and youth.

DATA POINTS

General protective services reports continue to outpace reports of child abuse by nearly

FOUR TIMES.

24,665

children were served in the foster care system in 2019, with over

7,000

 experiencing a first-time entry.

Only

38.7%

of children in the foster care system are placed with family or kin.

Black children and children of multiple races are represented in foster care more than

TWO TIMES

their rate in the general population.

POLICY PRIORITIES:

1. Strengthen the response to child abuse by building a strong and robust community prevention model.

- Evaluate the impacts on child protection and safety as a result of decreased reporting due to the pandemic.
- Analyze the outcomes of the 2015-2016 child protective services law, including child protective and general protective services designations and how counties allocate resources.
- Monitor the state's implementation of the Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) as a strategy in improving the prevention continuum and decreasing use of out-of-home care.
- Promote a differential response system that better serves families in poverty rather than over surveillance of them.

2. Improve policies that increase the identification and utilization of kin resources.

- Identify national best practices and strategies that increase usage of family-based prevention to support and uplift biological parents and keep families intact, including those services that are identified through FFPSA.
- Enhance foster family recruitment, licensing, training and retention policies to eliminate practices that discriminate against and arbitrarily disqualify kin from being approved as resources, including identifying supportive services for kin families.

- c. Strengthen and require ongoing permanency services for all children and youth in foster care until legal permanency is achieved, regardless of their court-ordered permanency goal.
- d. Uplift the lived experiences of biological parents, kin, and children/youth who have been impacted by the child welfare system as a catalyst to identifying strategies that best support those being served.

3. Reduce the use of group care unless it is necessary to meet the time-limited treatment needs of youth.

- a. Expand data collection and analysis to better understand the characteristics of youth being placed in congregate care settings, including dependent and delinquent youth.
- b. Advocate for the increased use of evidence-based or research-informed discharge services to better support re-entry into the community and decrease the need for additional future out-of-home placements.
- c. Determine the impacts of the pandemic on increased youth discharges from group homes to community settings and identify tangible solutions to ensure that congregate care placements do not increase post-COVID-19.
- d. Analyze the educational programs provided to youth in congregate care to identify ways to ensure that they are receiving high-quality services.

4. Improve outcomes for transition age youth in foster care or exiting to adulthood.

- a. Identify strategies for building connections with supportive adults, inclusion of voice in policy planning, promoting access to high-quality services, and elevating needs for effectively transitioning to adulthood.
- b. Enhance the delivery of permanency services to older youth to ensure the promotion of increased availability of family settings, connections to siblings, and the identification and outreach to kin.
- c. Continue to evaluate the impacts of FFPSA on older youth to ensure the state's service array focuses on placement prevention, achievement of permanency, and increased access to after-care supports.
- d. Identify ways to utilize National Youth in Transition Database information to better illuminate the needs of older youth transitioning to adulthood.

5. Monitor policy reform to ensure the child welfare system is adequately supported from both financial and staffing perspectives at the federal, state and county levels.

- a. Review, and when appropriate, provide feedback on the annual Needs Based Plan and Budget.
- b. Identify strategies to maintain a qualified, competent child welfare workforce.
- c. Continue to partner with the Office of Children, Youth and Families on the federal and local needs for system improvement.

LEGISLATIVE OR REGULATORY ACTION NEEDED TO ADVANCE POLICY PRIORITIES:

- Revision of the Title 55, Chapter 3130 regulations which govern the administration of children and youth services. Modifications are needed to better support child welfare agencies in efforts of staff retention in areas such as staffing ratios and caseloads.
- Revision of the Title 55, Chapter 3700 regulations which govern the approval of licensure for kinship and foster parents. Regulatory updates should aim to decrease bias in decision-making and eliminate discriminatory practices that deny kin from being licensed caregivers.
- Modifications to both the Family Finding and Kinship Care bulletins, which are county guidance documents developed by OCYF. These bulletins provide guidance to counties on the implementation of family finding, family stabilization efforts, and increasing child placement with kin.
- Updates to the Kinship Care Act and Family Finding Act. Additional data collection and accountability measures for counties are statutorily needed to increase greater family finding efforts and child placement with kin.

ACTIONS WE'RE WATCHING:

- Pennsylvania will be implementing their Title IV-E prevention services plan as identified through the Family First Prevention Services Act effective July 1, 2021.