



# 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 children who are victims of trauma, the system should ensure that services heal and preserve the family. If out-of-home care is necessary, ensure placement is in a family-based setting, preferably with kin. Community-based interventions can prevent unnecessary out-of-home removal, expedite reunification, and ensure permanency for every child and youth.

## DATA POINTS

The top **5** reasons for placement are for non-abuse factors, including neglect, inability to cope, and substance use.

General protective services reports outpace reports of child abuse by more than **4X**.

Black children, Hispanic children, and children of multiple races have

**DISPROPORTIONATELY HIGHER RATES** of CPS referrals, including substantiations and valid GPS allegations.

**3 IN 10** transition age youth are placed in congregate care, and only **29.9%** are placed with kin.

**20,490** children were served in the foster care system in 2021, with over **5,000** children experiencing a first-time entry.

Black children and children of multiple races are disproportionately represented in foster care at

**MORE THAN 2X** their rate in the general population.

Black children are **4.5X** more likely to re-enter care and more than 4x more likely to remain in care than White children.

## POLICY PRIORITIES:

- 1. Strengthen the response to child abuse and neglect by building a robust community prevention model.**
  - Analyze the outcomes of the 2013-14 child protective services law, including child protective services and general protective services to determine how to address allegations of poverty and neglect adequately.
  - 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.
  - Research diversionary and community-based models that support primary prevention and serve families within their communities to reduce the need for formal child welfare intervention.
- 2. Improve policies that increase the identification and utilization of kin resources.**
  - Enhance kinship family recruitment, licensing, training, and retention policies to eliminate discriminatory practices that arbitrarily disqualify kin from being approved as resources, including identifying supportive services for kin families; develop a formal waiver process for non-safety factors.
  - Review licensing and training requirements for foster parents to ensure they are adequately supported to raise children and youth with complex needs and significant trauma. Elevate the lived

experiences of biological parents, kin, and children and youth the child welfare system has impacted as a catalyst to identifying strategies that best support those being served.

- c. Update the Kinship Care Act, Family Finding Act, and Juvenile Act. Additional data collection and accountability measures for counties are statutorily needed for improved family finding efforts and placing children with kin.

### **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 youth's characteristics 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. Monitor outcomes of the complex case process and research how the mental health, behavioral health, and substance use systems can support youth before the need for formal congregate care placement.

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

- a. Identify strategies for building connections with supportive adults, 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 promote increased availability of family settings, connections to siblings, and identifying and contacting kin.
- c. Analyze educational data for foster youth to determine if impacts from educational stability policies have intended results; further identify ways to promote career exploration and goal-setting practices to consider technical and post-secondary education options.
- d. Utilize the recommendations received through youth community feedback sessions to set formal policy recommendations and identify how youth can be more integrated into advocacy efforts.

### **5. Ensure that biological parents, caregivers, and children and youth receive adequate mental and behavioral health services to avoid the need for formal child welfare intervention and foster care placement.**

- a. Conduct a landscape analysis of how the mental health and behavioral health services are provided to individuals reported to the child welfare system at different points in the life of a case (i.e., investigation, dependency, etc.).
- b. Further analyze Pennsylvania's Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) and other placement data for children and youth being placed for mental or behavioral health instability to determine what services were provided to mitigate risk and further identify prevention approaches.

### **6. 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.

### **7. Continue to partner with the Office of Children, Youth, and Families (OCYF) on the federal and local needs for system improvement.**

## **SIGNIFICANT ACTIONS IMPACTING 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 staff retention efforts like staffing ratios and caseloads.
- Revision of the Title 55, Chapter 3700 regulations that govern the approval of licensure for kinship and foster parents. Regulatory updates should aim to decrease decision-making bias and eliminate discriminatory practices that deny kin from being licensed caregivers.
- Modifications to the Family Finding and Kinship Care bulletins—county guidance documents developed by OCYF. These bulletins guide counties on implementing family finding, family stabilization efforts, and increasing child placement with kin.