



# The Human Services Workforce Initiative

## *Promoting Child Welfare Workforce Improvements Through Federal Policy Changes*



Prepared by  
the Children's Defense Fund and Children's Rights, Inc.

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# PROMOTING CHILD WELFARE WORKFORCE IMPROVEMENTS THROUGH FEDERAL POLICY CHANGES

A Project of the Children's Defense Fund and Children's Rights, Inc.



This report is part of a project entitled "Promoting Child Welfare Workforce Improvements through Federal Policy Changes," undertaken by the Children's Defense Fund and Children's Rights, Inc., with the assistance of Cornerstones for Kids. The findings and conclusions presented in this report are those of the Children's Defense Fund and Children's Rights and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of Cornerstones for Kids.

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## **PROMOTING CHILD WELFARE WORKFORCE IMPROVEMENTS THROUGH FEDERAL POLICY CHANGES**

### **Cornerstones for Kids Introduction**

The Human Services Workforce Initiative (HSWI) is focused on the frontline workers serving vulnerable children and families. HSWI's premise is that human services matter. Delivered well, they can, and do, positively impact the lives of vulnerable children and families, often at critical points in their lives.

We believe that the quality of the frontline worker influences the effectiveness of services they deliver to children and families. If workers are well-trained and supported, have access to the resources that they need, possess a reasonable workload, and are valued by their employers, it follows that they will be able to effectively perform their jobs. If, however, they are as vulnerable as the children and families that they serve, they will be ineffective in improving outcomes for children and families.

Unfortunately, all indications today are that our frontline human services workforce is struggling. In some instances poor compensation contributes to excessive turnover; in others an unreasonable workload and endless paperwork render otherwise capable staff ineffective; and keeping morale up is difficult in the human services fields. It is remarkable that so many human services professionals stick to it, year after year.

HSWI's mission is to work with others to raise the visibility of, and sense of urgency about, workforce issues. Through a series of publications and other communications efforts we hope to

- Call greater attention to workforce issues
- Help to describe and define the status of the human services workforce
- Disseminate data on current conditions
- Highlight best and promising practices
- Suggest systemic and policy actions that can make a deep, long term difference

The series of reports collected here were produced by the Children's Defense Fund and Children's Rights, Inc., which provided leadership for a coalition of organizations to discuss the workforce challenges that impede efforts to meet critical child welfare outcomes and to develop a set of federal policy recommendations to support workforce improvements. Although workforce challenges have long been acknowledged by these national organizations, the recommendations described in these reports represent an important step toward crafting a comprehensive federal policy response to this important issue. Cornerstones for Kids contends that these policy options deserve serious consideration as we move forward to make needed changes in the conditions of the child welfare workforce.

Additional information on the human services workforce, and on HSWI, is available at [www.cornerstones4kids.org](http://www.cornerstones4kids.org).

Cornerstones for Kids  
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**Complete references for Child Welfare Workforce Project**  
[www.childrensdefense.org](http://www.childrensdefense.org) and [www.childrensrights.org](http://www.childrensrights.org)

## **Introduction**

Promoting Child Welfare Workforce Improvements through Federal Policy Changes is a project undertaken by the Children's Defense Fund (CDF) and Children's Rights, Inc., in 2005-2006 with the generous assistance of Cornerstones for Kids. The findings and conclusions presented in this report are those of the Children's Defense Fund and Children's Rights and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of Cornerstones for Kids. The Children's Defense Fund and Children's Rights thank Cornerstones for Kids for its support of this work and, specifically, Jennifer Miller, who provided helpful insights and guidance throughout the project.

Both CDF and Children's Rights have pursued for many years improvements on behalf of children in the child welfare system through research, public education, federal policy reforms, litigation, and other advocacy strategies and understand the importance of a highly competent and experienced workforce. From their work, it is clear that even basic improvements in child welfare practice and outcomes for children and families who come to the attention of the child welfare system will not be realized without improvements in the child welfare workforce. The best policy reforms will have only minimal impact on children without quality staff to translate reforms into good practice for both children and families. Therefore, the goal of this project was to identify and describe the essential components of an effective child welfare workforce and to identify federal policy improvements that could help promote a quality, effective child welfare workforce.

The convening of a Federal Child Welfare Workforce Policy Group was central to the process of developing federal policy recommendations for improving the child welfare workforce. CDF and Children's Rights brought together a diverse group of individuals and organizations with expertise on child welfare workforce concerns representing key stakeholders in child welfare. The group's purpose was to assess barriers to a quality workforce, consider strategies to address them, and develop federal policy options to help promote an effective child welfare workforce that, in turn, could help ensure comprehensive integrated services for children, youth, and families and the effective stewardship of funds to increase positive outcomes for children and families.

The Federal Child Welfare Workforce Policy Group included representatives of the Alliance for Children and Families; American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees; American Public Human Services Association; Black Administrators in Child Welfare; Casey Family Services; Catholic Charities USA; Center for Law and Social Policy; Center for the Study of Social Policy; Child Welfare League of America; Children and Family Research Center at the University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana; Council of Family and Child Caring Agencies; Council on Social Work Education; Institute for the Advancement of Social Work Research; Lutheran Services in America; National Association of Counties; National Association of Social Workers; National Conference of State Legislatures; Policy America; and Salem State College School of Social Work.

To help build a case for promoting an effective child welfare workforce, CDF and Children's Rights developed several different sets of materials intended to assist policy makers, public and private providers, staff working directly with children in the child welfare system, researchers, advocates for children and families, and others promoting workforce changes as they consider appropriate steps to improve the quality of the child welfare workforce in order to improve outcomes for children and families. The "Key Facts" document and the "Federal Policy Options" report with its five component parts

are included here. The two additional reports can be accessed through links on the “Contents” page above.

- **Key Facts: Improving the Child Welfare Workforce to Help Children and Families.** New federal policy approaches and resources are needed to support a child welfare workforce that can deliver high quality services and ensure that children are safe and have the opportunity to grow up in permanent families. This simple one-page fact sheet highlights three compelling facts to encourage investments in improving the child welfare workforce to help children and families.
- **Federal Policy Options for Improving the Child Welfare Workforce.** The policy options were developed and reviewed by participants in the Child Welfare Workforce Policy Group. While the organizations represented have not been asked to individually endorse the recommendations in this child welfare workforce improvement package, their insights and experiences were invaluable as the various options were being finalized. Members of the group provided an important sounding board for the different proposals. The federal child welfare workforce policy options include:
  1. **Creating a Comprehensive Child Welfare Workforce Improvement Demonstration.** A Comprehensive Child Welfare Workforce Improvement Demonstration gives states an opportunity to ensure that child welfare workers: know how to accurately assess and provide what children and families need, have the resources they need to support their work, and are connected to the children, families, and communities with which they are working. States must assess their ongoing progress in each area and designate those areas they want to target for federal support from the child welfare workforce improvement demonstration. The framework presented provides an opportunity for self-assessment and for developing action plans that could be supported at multiple levels. In addition, there is also a proposal for the National Academy of Sciences to undertake a National Child Welfare Workforce Study to make recommendations about appropriate workloads and caseloads and necessary competencies for child welfare workers.
  2. **Enhancing Training for Staff Working with Abused and Neglected Children or Children at Risk of Abuse and Neglect: Improving the Major Federal Child Welfare Training Program (Title IV-E).** Improved training is needed for all staff working with children and families who come to the attention of the child welfare system in order to pursue the goals of safety, permanence, and well-being. Staff are responsible for providing protections and improving outcomes for all children in foster care, and they should receive quality training to meet their obligations to the children. Under this proposal, certain restrictions in the federal Title IV-E Training Program would be eliminated so staff of public agencies, private agencies, courts, and mental health, substance abuse treatment, and domestic violence agencies serving any of the children in child welfare would be eligible for the training, as would supervisors and others in leadership positions.

3. **Providing Incentives to Recruit and Retain Quality Staff in Child Welfare Agencies and Family Courts: Expanding Loan Forgiveness.** Loan forgiveness programs at the state and federal levels can provide fiscal incentives for individuals to work with children in public or private non-profit child welfare agencies and for attorneys to work with low-income children and families in family court. Federal loan forgiveness programs already assist teachers, early childhood and child care staff, selected Head Start program staff, and those providing early intervention services for children with disabilities, nurses, law enforcement and corrections officials, and selected members of the armed forces by offsetting or canceling their student loans. This proposal expands the current programs to include reductions in student loans for former students or law students who become and stay employed in child welfare agencies or family courts. Such programs can help to improve recruitment and retention for qualified individuals to represent and serve vulnerable children.
  4. **Increasing Accountability for the Child Welfare Workforce: Improving the Quality of Federal Child Welfare Data.** To guarantee improvements in the quality of the workforce, renewed efforts are needed to ensure that federal data systems adequately track the experiences of the workforce in improving outcomes for children and families. Under this proposal, data would be collected over time and with unique identifiers for both children and staff to allow for better tracking of outcomes for children and families and service goals. Better data also would be collected on the demographics of the child welfare workforce.
  5. **Looking More Comprehensively at Workforce in the Child and Family Service Reviews.** The Child and Family Service Reviews assess states' child welfare programs based on a large number of criteria, but staff training is the only component of the child welfare workforce that is addressed specifically in the CFSRs. In its review of findings from the CFSRs, the General Accountability Office noted that, in the majority of states, one or more workforce deficiencies (high caseloads, training deficiencies, and staffing shortages) were cited as affecting attainment of outcomes. If the CFSR and resulting Program Improvement Plan processes more comprehensively assess workforce concerns they can help move states toward better child welfare outcomes.
- **“Components of an Effective Child Welfare Workforce to Improve Outcomes for Children and Families: What Does the Research Tell Us?”** This report documents the importance of 14 key components of an effective child welfare workforce. Using a schematic diagram and summarizing the results of an extensive literature review, the paper discusses the importance of each of the components and emphasizes their connectedness in improving the workforce. The appendix describes research on several workforce concerns: caseloads and workloads, training, education and licensing, and staffing shortages and details the impact of each on outcomes for children, youth, and families and agency budgets. An extensive reference list on the child welfare workforce is included.



- **“Supporting and Improving the Child Welfare Workforce: A Review of Program Improvement Plans and Recommendations for Strengthening the Child and Family Service Reviews.”** This report offers a review of the Program Improvement Plans (PIPs) developed by each state as part of the Child and Family Service Review (CFSR) process. CDF and Children’s Rights conducted this review to assess the extent to which workforce issues were being identified and assessed by states as part of their PIPs, even though there is only one formal outcome measure in which workforce is specifically addressed (training). This report discusses workforce activities in states in four areas: workloads and caseloads, worker time and contacts, skills and training, and accreditation and quality assurance systems. The report offers a snapshot of the numerous workforce challenges experienced by the states and the strategies underway in the states to address them. This review highlights states’ recognition of the impact of workforce concerns on outcomes for children and families and the relationship of workforce challenges to other problems identified through the CFSRs. One-third of the states commented on workforce challenges in the introductions of their PIPs. About half of the states’ PIPs offered either recommendations or requirements for improvements in caseloads or workloads. This report makes several recommendations for changes in the CFSRs that will help promote workforce improvements and enhance outcomes for children.

## **IMPROVING THE CHILD WELFARE WORKFORCE TO HELP CHILDREN AND FAMILIES: KEY FACTS**

The recruitment, preparation, support, and retention of child welfare staff working with abused and neglected children and their families across the nation are important and ongoing concerns. New federal policy approaches and resources are needed to support a child welfare workforce that is able to deliver high quality services and ensure that children are safe and have the opportunity to grow up in permanent families.

- ❑ **High caseloads get in the way of effective work with children and families.**
  - High caseloads result in workers not having enough time to make adequate face-to-face contacts with children and families, prepare appropriate case plans and reports, receive adequate supervision, and make thoughtful decisions that affect children's lives.
  - High caseloads contribute to poor relationships between workers and families and to the reentry of children into foster care.
  - In a national survey of 29 union affiliates representing 13,380 child welfare workers, only 11% had average foster care caseloads meeting the Child Welfare League of America's national standards.
  
- ❑ **Staff turnover hurts children and families.**
  - 90% of states report difficulty hiring and retaining qualified staff.
  - The average tenure of child welfare workers is less than two years.
  - Studies indicate that dissatisfaction with supervision is one of the primary reasons for worker turnover. In a study of more than 30 states' training programs, one-third reported no supervisory training at all, and in another third, the training provided was inadequate.
  - Caseworker turnover is associated with children's multiple placements in foster care, longer lengths of stay for children in foster care, and lower rates of finding permanent homes for children.
  - Worker turnover results in families' receipt of fewer services and is a major factor in failed efforts to reunify children with their families.
  
- ❑ **Staff turnover costs money.**
  - Turnover results in delays in finding children permanent homes, which result in increased foster care caseloads and more funds being spent overall, as foster care is more expensive than adoption or other permanency options.
  - The U.S. Department of Labor estimates that the cost of worker turnover is approximately one-third of a worker's annual salary.
  - It takes more than six months to advertise for, recruit, and train new employees to assume a full caseload.

This is a solvable problem with federal policy and resources to support lower caseloads, enhanced training and professional development, loan forgiveness, improved data collection, and other strategies.

Research citations and detailed information about federal policy proposals are available at [www.childrensrights.org](http://www.childrensrights.org) and [www.childrensdefense.org](http://www.childrensdefense.org)

## FEDERAL POLICY OPTIONS FOR IMPROVING THE CHILD WELFARE WORKFORCE

Five policy proposals were identified as important in improving the child welfare workforce. Each is considered in the sections that follow.

### I. Creating a Comprehensive Child Welfare Workforce Improvement Demonstration

#### Purpose:

To ensure positive outcomes and experiences for children who are at risk of or have experienced child abuse and neglect, it is crucial to develop and maintain a skilled, knowledgeable child welfare workforce that can deliver quality services and supports.

An effective child welfare workforce requires workers who have the understanding, skills, and supports necessary to meet the needs of the children and families they serve. A child welfare worker must:

- **Know how to accurately assess and provide what children and families need.** Child welfare workers must have quality education and professional preparation, meaningful supervision and mentoring, and competency-based training and professional development throughout their time in child welfare. This will help them identify and build on the strengths of children and families as they address their needs.
- **Have the resources they need to support their work.** Adequate resources include: having time to spend with children and families in order to ensure their safety and address their complex needs; caseloads that will allow them enough time to do their jobs well; the services families and children need, and the skills to provide them. Manageable caseloads must be coupled with strong and consistent leadership and a supportive organizational environment, including human resources policies that are consistent with the agency's mission and promote the strengths of staff and reward them for quality work. Practice-enhancing research and evaluation and timely and accurate data and information can help ensure workers are able to provide children with the most appropriate services. Technological resources that help staff better meet children's and families' needs, safe and suitable working conditions, and equitable employment incentives also enhance the ability of workers to do their jobs well.
- **Be connected to the communities and families with which they are working.** Such connections help workers to understand, respect, and know how to work within the cultural context in which children and families live. Community and family connections help workers access both informal and formal services and supports in the community and help workers engage families in efforts to assess and address their children's needs.

### **Child Welfare and Workforce Improvement Grants:**

States that commit to developing and implementing comprehensive state plans for developing an effective child welfare workforce may apply for a three- to five-year demonstration grant to help promote the strategies necessary to implement the components of an effective child welfare workforce strategy.

### **Establishment of a Child Welfare Workforce Quality Improvement Task Force:**

The state agency responsible for administering programs under Titles IV-B and IV-E of the Social Security Act shall convene a Child Welfare Workforce Quality Improvement Task Force to guide it in the development, implementation, and ongoing monitoring of a plan for improving the effectiveness of the child welfare workforce. The task force may be an already constituted entity, a newly established entity that is added to an overarching quality improvement work group, or a new stand-alone entity. The task force shall include, at a minimum, birth, foster, adoptive and kinship families, and youth formerly involved with the child welfare system; representatives of public and private child welfare service agencies, including those who provide services to address children and families' complex needs, child welfare staff with varying tenures and experiences working directly with children and families, and, where applicable, representatives of their unions; state and local child welfare officials; representatives of schools of social work and other educational institutions that prepare child welfare workers for employment; court personnel who handle child abuse and neglect cases; state and local advocates for children and families; and where possible, researchers who have studied and assessed the child welfare workforce.

### **Child Welfare Workforce Quality Improvement Plan Components:**

In Part I of its grant application, a state shall provide data reflecting current workforce challenges and describe the actions it is taking or will take to strengthen its child welfare workforce in the three major areas noted above:

#### ***1. Accurately Assessing and Providing What Children and Families Need***

To ensure the child welfare workforce (*managers, supervisors, and line workers*) knows how to accurately assess and provide what children and families need, a state will describe, as part of its application, what activities it has taken, is taking, or proposes to take to make improvements in the following areas: (*Questions in italics are illustrative only.*)

- **Education and training of staff prior to employment.** *What are the current requirements and credentials for staff? How have the requirements and credentials for various positions been adjusted to better match the qualifications needed? What proportion of your staff came with child welfare-specific education and training? What proportion of your staff came with BSWs or MSWs? What pre-service training and competencies are required? How do requirements for managers and others with supervisory experience differ from requirements for line workers?*
- **Ongoing competency-based training and professional development activities that enhance child outcomes.** *What in-service competencies are*

*required? How many of your caseworkers and supervisors have a BSW or MSW degree and what plans, if any, do you have for increasing that proportion? Are staff given a period of time before they must carry a caseload? What ongoing training is provided and how do you assess the effectiveness of the training? How are your Title IV-E training funds helping you provide the training? What are your required qualifications for supervisors and what supports do they receive? What special training is provided to help supervisors gain the skills they need to assist workers? What additional professional development activities (e.g., shadowing, experiential activities monitored by a coach, time-limited internships within the agency, etc.) are you using? What plans does the state have for developing and/or strengthening the cultural competence of the staff? What specific steps have been or will be taken to identify racial disproportionality at key decision making points for staff?*

- **Provisions for supervision and mentoring of staff.** *What is the current actual caseworker to supervisor ratio and what are the plans to improve it in various areas? What types of buddy or mentoring arrangements are provided for new staff or staff members that move to new practice areas? How do you select and address the effectiveness of the mentors?*
- **Promotion of positive leadership and leadership skills within the department/ agency that help workers carry out their responsibilities to ensure positive outcomes and experiences for the children and families they serve.** *How do you operationally define leadership? What leadership training or in-service experience do you provide to new leaders? To what extent do your leaders seek policy and practice input from workers and the children, youth, and families they serve? How do you evaluate the leadership skills of supervisors and others in management positions? How do you see leadership in the department or agency reflected in workers' interactions with the families they serve? How do you demonstrate that leadership development is an ongoing activity in your agency?*

## **2. Ensuring the Child Welfare Workforce Has the Resources Needed to Support Its Work with Children and Families**

To ensure that the child welfare workforce has the resources needed to support its work with children and families, a state will describe the current status of each of the following components of an effective child welfare workforce and what it is doing or proposes to do to improve each of them:

- **Manageability of caseloads and workloads carried by child welfare workers, including front line workers, supervisors, and managers.** *Has your state conducted a caseload or workload assessment and what were the results? How have time management techniques been implemented and assessed as part of the workload assessment process? Does your state have a caseload allocation system? Has your state established caseload standards in the various areas of child welfare practice? If so, what are they and how close are you to achieving them? What supervisory caseload standards have you established?*

- **Organizational environment in which child welfare workers work.** *What data or examples do you have that the agency's policies and practices are being implemented in ways that are congruent with the agency's mission? What opportunities are there for individual creativity and independent decisionmaking by staff? To what extent are staff and supervisors involved in decisionmaking and/or made aware of decisions and the rationale behind them? How is good performance rewarded? What career ladders are in place and what opportunities are there for promotions within the agency? How is the morale of the agency evaluated? What are the benefits that help retain staff? What steps have you taken or planned to strengthen your human resources capacity?*
- **Effectiveness of the oversight and accountability of the child welfare system and those who work within it.** *What accreditation, quality assurance, and oversight activities does your system have in place? What national benchmarks do you use in evaluating your performance? What mechanisms are in place for engaging the children, families, and communities served in the evaluation process? What plans do you have in place for improvements? How do you use this information to enhance worker performance, service delivery and child outcomes? How do you communicate internally and externally the importance of accountability for the children and families served? How are performance expectations clarified for staff and performance tracked over time? What are the mechanisms used to monitor and maintain accountability in privatized child welfare systems?*
- **Timeliness and accuracy of the data and information available to child welfare staff.** *What information do staff receive about how well they have performed? What information do staff get about how well the children and families they serve are doing? Can staff access the data and compare their progress with others' cases with similar backgrounds? To what extent are data on worker performance reviewed across workers, counties, and regions?*
- **Quality of the practice-enhancing research and evaluations available to child welfare staff.** *Do staff understand the evidence for various practice initiatives being undertaken? What evidence-based practices is the state using? Do staff know what the outcomes are for the children and families they serve? How are staff kept apprised of best practices? How are staff involved in establishing research agendas? How else does the state agency actively collaborate with research to enhance child welfare practice?*
- **Assistance in accessing needed services.** *How do workers know what services and other resources are available to them? How are you using technology to access needed services? How are staff made aware of the various federal funding streams that might be available to them? How are connections with staff in related service agencies, such as substance abuse prevention and treatment, mental health prevention and treatment, and domestic violence, facilitated? What procedures are in place to help staff secure services and other resources on an expedited basis? What procedures are in place to help workers document services that they need but that are not available?*

- **Appropriate technological resources available to support child welfare staff.** *Do staff have access to computers at their desks? Do they have lap top computers to take with them when they are on the road? Do they have access to the Internet? Do they have cell phones, pagers, other hand-held devices such as PDAs, and/or voice recorders and transcription software? How have staff used technology to assess children and families, locate extended families, identify needed resources, enhance worker safety, etc.? Do staff get regular reports on their caseloads, including an action report on relevant practice and administrative timelines? How have SACWIS funds been used to promote gains in this area?*
- **Safety and suitability of the working conditions encountered by child welfare staff.** *How does the agency track and assess workers' exposure to violence, threats, and unsafe working space? What trends do data on these issues indicate? What steps does the agency take to try to minimize safety risks to its workers? What arrangements does the agency have for collaboration with law enforcement to minimize risks to staff and to families? What steps have been taken to increase the suitability of the work place for serving families and meeting other staff needs? To what extent do you assess human capabilities and try to relate them appropriately to work demands?*
- **Recruitment and retention of child welfare staff.** *What is your staff turnover rate? How do you evaluate it? How does it vary from one practice area to another or from one area of the state to another? What are the major causes of turnover? How do you determine these? What recruitment and retention strategies are you using? What special efforts have you made to recruit from marginalized populations? What are your most effective recruitment and retention strategies and what evidence do you have of their success? What steps have you taken to reduce caseworker turnover?*
- **Financing from a variety of resources to enhance the quality of the child welfare workforce and afford staff the flexibility they need to improve outcomes for children.** *What funds are used to support child welfare staff? What accommodations are there for rewarding performance? What mix of public and private funds has been most effective? What flexible funds do staff have available to address the needs of children and families?*
- **Monitoring and evaluation.** *What has been done or what plans are underway or pending to monitor the progress made in increasing and improving the resources needed to enhance the work of staff with children and families? What specific workforce improvements are you evaluating and how are you evaluating them? What is the specific role of the leadership team in the agency in monitoring and evaluating performance? What efforts are made to link performance to improved outcomes for children and families?*

### **3. Connecting the Child Welfare Workforce to the Children and Families It Serves and Their Communities**

To ensure that the child welfare workforce sustains connections with the children and families it serves and their communities, a state will describe the specific steps it has taken or is proposing to strengthen the following areas:

- **Cultural competence and sensitivity of the child welfare workforce.** *What plans do you have in place for developing and/or strengthening the cultural competence of child welfare staff? How are you assessing racial disproportionality at key decision points? What steps have you taken to overcome language barriers or other barriers that exclude children or families from access to services?*
- **Knowledge and skills of the child welfare workforce to engage with families and children, their communities, and to build on the strengths of each in promoting resources for children and families.** *How does your workforce engage families and children in addressing children's need? How does your workforce engage both the locational and identificational communities of these families? Does your agency use family team meetings/family group decision making and, if so, how does it engage extended family and community representatives in these meetings? What tools do you use to identify the strengths of families and communities? What special staff training is done to assist staff in engaging families and communities? How are agencies working with community organizations, such as those that address poverty, racism, substance abuse, and other problems, to meet the needs of the children and families they are serving?*
- **Capacity to respond to and educate other community agencies and organizations about child welfare work (including but not limited to schools, medical facilities, substance abuse, mental health, and domestic violence agencies, courts, faith communities, and the media).** *How does your agency interact with the agencies and organizations noted above? To what extent do you draw upon the resources of these other agencies and organizations to assist families and children? How does your staff work in teams with staff from other agencies to serve children and families?*

#### **Specific Grant Activities:**

In Part II of its grant application, a state shall describe the specific activities that it will pursue with these grant funds, and its rationale for choosing these activities and how they will help improve the child welfare workforce and outcomes for children:

- **Specific goals the state proposes to achieve in each of the three areas noted above with the grant funds under the Child Welfare Workforce Demonstration Grant Program.** The state shall undertake at least one goal in each of the areas unless it can justify why such an undertaking with these funds would not be appropriate. In addition to the overall goals, the state shall also specify interim annual goals in each of the areas identified (e.g., moving closer to the CWLA caseload standards for workers and for supervisors in prevention,



foster care, adoption, or other specific areas; improving worker retention; improving the relevant education and experience of staff who are hired, etc.). The application must address the plan it will implement to achieve these goals and how the goals, if achieved, will help a state implement its Program Improvement Plan and improve its performance in the Child and Family Service Review.

- **The state's rationale for targeting these goals.** The state shall describe the findings that emerged from the assessment in Part I of the grant application, the areas in the child welfare workforce that were identified as needing improvement, the goals that need to be achieved and plans for achieving the goals and improved outcomes for children.
- **Activities the state will undertake to achieve the goals.** The state shall describe the specific activities that it will undertake to achieve both the interim and long-term goals. For each, the state shall describe the activity and specify how it will impact outcomes for children either directly or indirectly.
- **Plans for measuring at least annually the state's progress in achieving the goals.** The state shall establish interim benchmarks for assessing the state's progress in achieving the goals.
- **Estimate of the cost of implementing the specific activities described.**
- **Assessment or evaluation results that support the efficacy of the specific activities proposed and their impact on improving the quality of the child welfare workforce and outcomes for children.**
- **Request for a specific grant amount.** The grant amounts shall not exceed \$\_\_\_\* a year.

#### **Grant Approval:**

Once developed, the child welfare workforce plan must be approved by the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). In reviewing and approving the grant applications, the Secretary of HHS shall make awards in a manner that recognizes the need to build on work already underway in a state as well as to reward those states that are just beginning to revise their systems.

#### **Number of Grants:**

Up to \_\_\_\* grants will be awarded for a three-year period and \_\_\_\* for a five-year period.

#### **Scope of the Grants:**

State child welfare agencies will be the applicants, but they can be joined by other partners, including, but not limited to, private non-profit agencies or consortia of such agencies, Indian tribal organizations, universities and colleges, and others advocating for improvements in the child welfare workforce to improve outcomes for children and families. Although state agencies must apply, the grant need not be state-wide in scope. Instead, the grant may be provided for activities to be undertaken in a specific portion of the state.

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\* The exact figures will be determined later.

**Minimum Grants:**

Any state that applies for a grant and is approved will receive no more than \$\_\_\_\_\*. States also will be required to provide an increasing state match in the amount of 10 percent the first year, 15 percent the second year, and 25 percent the third year. At the end of the third year, states also will receive a federal incentive payment if they have achieved the goals they sought that shall consist of \$\_\_\_\_\* or a \_\_\_\_\* percent increase in the federal match for their Title IV-E child placement activity funding, as determined by the Secretary of HHS. The specific amount of the payment will depend on the relative progress made by the states taking into consideration where they started.

**Duration of the Grants:**

Each grant will continue for at least three years but no more than five years unless the state requests that it be discontinued or the periodic reports from the state to HHS indicate that progress toward the goals is not being achieved.

**Funding for the Child Welfare Workforce Improvement Demonstration Program:**

Given the importance of improving outcomes for children and families who come to the attention of the child welfare system, many of whom are children who have been helped or abandoned by other systems, and the importance of a quality child welfare workforce in improving outcomes for children and families, at least \_\_\_\_\* grants will be available under Title IV-E of the Social Security Act for the purpose of making awards to states under this program. These amounts will be available from Title IV-E for this purpose for only a defined period of time (not to exceed six years) and a decision about the most appropriate way to finance child welfare workforce improvements in the future will be made at the end of that period of time.

**Technical Assistance:**

HHS will provide technical assistance to grantees for the duration of the grant period. The technical assistance will help states assess their child welfare workforce, identify improvements that have been made and those that are still needed and develop a work plan for best addressing the components of an effective child welfare workforce.

**Evaluation:**

HHS will arrange for an evaluation of the demonstrations that tracks the progress made by individual states, the activities and methods used, and the impact on outcomes for children and families. Funding for this will be available through Title IV-E.

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\* The exact figures will be determined later.

## NATIONAL CHILD WELFARE WORKFORCE STUDY

The National Academy of Sciences shall convene a workgroup to oversee a national study of the child welfare workforce that consists of representatives of at least the following: staff from the Children's Bureau in the Department of Health and Human Services; state and local child welfare officials; public and private child welfare service providers; birth, foster, adoptive, and kinship care families, and youth formerly involved in the child welfare system; child welfare staff working directly with children and families with varying tenures and experiences, and in addition, where applicable, representatives of their unions; court personnel that handle child abuse and neglect cases; representatives of schools of social work and other educational institutions that prepare child welfare workers for employment; researchers who have studied and addressed the child welfare workforce; and state, local, and national advocates for children and families.

This study shall examine and make recommendations about two principle components of the child welfare workforce:

1. **Appropriate workloads for child welfare workers.** The study shall assess child welfare workloads (as opposed to simple measures of caseloads) in states, categorize various workload problems, highlight differences between rural and urban areas, as well as workloads for those managing different types of services (e.g., child protective, preventive, family preservation, foster care, kinship care, adoption, and youth independent living services), review existing workload standards, and recommend a set of national "best practice" standards for the workloads and caseloads experienced by child welfare workers. The national workload component of the study shall include analysis of at least six to ten diverse jurisdictions from both county-administered and state-administered child welfare systems and shall develop national guidelines regarding the amount of time workers should devote to direct contacts with children and families and to many other tasks such as travel, collateral visits, outreach activities, court hearings, emergencies that interrupt regular work schedules, supervision, consultation, collaboration, and documentation.
2. **Appropriate knowledge and skills for child welfare workers.** The study shall also assess the necessary competencies child welfare workers, including supervisors, need to effectively perform their jobs. The study shall assess and make "best practice" recommendations about: (1) the different substantive areas in which child welfare workers must demonstrate mastery; (2) the various administrative, management, and supervisory skills workers, particularly supervisors and managers, must possess; (3) the most appropriate and effective ways of developing and maintaining those competencies among child welfare workers.

Funding for the National Child Welfare Workforce Study shall be authorized at \$\_\_\_\_\* per year for each of three fiscal years. The workgroup shall conduct national and regional briefings on its findings and shall publish the final report and recommendations within six months of the conclusion of the grant period so that it can incorporate in its report results from the demonstrations described above.

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\* The exact figures will be determined later.

## **II. Enhancing Training for Staff Working with Abused and Neglected Children or Children at Risk of Abuse and Neglect: Improving the Title IV-E Training Program**

### **Proposal: Maintain and Improve the Title IV-E Training Program**

- Maintain Title IV-E of the Social Security Act as a program with mandatory funding that offers training for all eligible staff and activities.
- Extend eligibility for Title IV-E training to all staff and supervisors working with children and families who come to the attention of the child welfare system. These should include staff of public agencies, private agencies, courts, and mental health, substance abuse treatment, and domestic violence agencies serving children in the child welfare system.
- Eliminate the current Title IV-E requirement that training expenditures be allocated in proportion to the percent of a state's caseload that is IV-E-eligible because states are held responsible for providing protection and improving outcomes for not just IV-E-eligible children but for all children in foster care.
- Expand training beyond just foster care and adoption issues to address the full range of activities needed to promote safety, permanence, and well-being for children in the child welfare system.

### **Challenges with the Current Title IV-E Training Program:**

- **Reimbursement is limited to staff working with Title IV-E-eligible children.** Despite the fact that states are held accountable by the federal government for outcomes for all children in care, states may only claim reimbursement for training of those staff or foster or adoptive parents or group care staff who are working with Title IV-E-eligible children. As a result, states are required to allocate their training costs based on the percentage of their caseload that is Title IV-E-eligible.
- **Many staff working with children are not eligible.** Generally, only public agency child welfare staff currently are eligible for either short- or long-term training. Staff of private child welfare agencies, staff of Indian tribal organizations, and staff of related service agencies, such as substance abuse treatment, mental health, and domestic violence agencies, are not eligible. Court staff also are not eligible.
- **Inconsistencies across U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) regions in allowable training activities.** Some regions have restricted Title IV-E reimbursable training only to foster care and adoption activities and excluded activities related to keeping children out of foster care or moving them to adoption and other permanency options. Other HHS regions define IV-E reimbursable activities more broadly.

### **Goal of the Proposal:**

- Improve child welfare practice in order to improve outcomes for children who come to the attention of the child welfare system.
- Extend the current reach of child welfare training funds so that they:
  - Reach all children who come to the attention of the child welfare system, since states are held accountable by the federal government for outcomes for all children.
  - Cover the range of staff that provide care, support, services, and treatment to children and families in the system, including staff of public and private child welfare agencies, the courts, substance abuse treatment, mental health, and domestic violence agencies, and prospective and current foster and adoptive parents.
  - Address the full range of activities needed to promote safety, permanence, and well-being for children in the child welfare system.
- Enhance accountability within Title IV-E for its impact on outcomes for children and families.

**Specifics of the Proposal:** Amend the current Title IV-E Training Program so that it better reaches staff in public, private non-profit, and Indian tribal organizations who are working to promote safety, permanence, and well-being for all the children in the child welfare system.

- **Extend training to additional staff working with children in the child welfare system:**
  - Personnel employed or preparing for employment by the state or local agency administering the plan, including short-term training and long-term training at education institutions through grants to the institutions or by direct financial assistance to students in the institutions. *(Covered by current law, but only reimbursable based on the percentage of the caseload that is IV-E-eligible; this proposal would eliminate the application of the IV-E penetration rate to determine federal reimbursement.)*
  - Current or prospective foster or adoptive parents, or permanent guardians and staff of group care settings for short-term training. *(Currently this group is limited to only foster and adoptive parents and staff who are caring for IV-E children.)*
  - Staff of private state-licensed or state-approved child welfare agencies that provide services or care to foster and adopted children and children with relative guardians. *(Currently staff of private agencies are not eligible.)*
  - Court staff, including judges, judicial personnel, staff of tribal courts, law enforcement personnel, agency attorneys, attorneys representing parents or children in proceedings conducted by or under the supervision of an abuse or neglect court, as well as volunteers who participate as CASAs or citizen review board members when under court auspices. *(Currently court staff are not eligible.)*

- Staff employed by state, local, private nonprofit, or Indian tribal organizations, substance abuse prevention and treatment agencies, mental health providers, domestic violence prevention and treatment providers, health agencies, child care agencies, and school and community service agencies that are working with the state or local agency administering the Title IV-E state plan to keep children safe and provide permanent families or are working with the children directly. (*Currently staff of related service agencies serving children in the child welfare system are not eligible.*)
- **Clarify the purpose of the training:**
  - Eligible training should include any training intended to assist the state in meeting the federal goals of safety, permanence, and well-being for children in or at risk of entering the child welfare system. (*Currently in some regions the purpose of the training is defined narrowly to include only foster care and adoption activities.*)
- **Eliminate the need to cost allocate funds based on IV-E eligibility:**
  - States should be eligible for training funds for all staff who are working with children and families to help them achieve safety, permanence, and well-being, consistent with the goals of the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA), since states are held accountable for outcomes for all the children in care.
  - Eliminate the need for states to adjust their training claims based on the percentage of their caseload that is IV-E-eligible.
- **Enhance accountability:**
  - Require states receiving Title IV-E training funds to develop a plan for evaluating the impact of these funds on developing a quality workforce and to publish this plan so it is available to the public and also submitted to HHS not more than 90 days after the end of the first fiscal year for which enhanced funds are received.
  - Each state, beginning after the second year of enhanced funding for Title IV-E training, shall report annually to HHS, no later than March 1 of each year, on the results of its training evaluation. At a minimum, the evaluation must address the nature of the training and other assistance that was provided (pre-service or in-service and the goals of the training), the types of staff (child welfare line staff, child welfare supervisors, courts, substance abuse agencies, etc.) for whom it was provided, the intended impact on children and families, and the outcomes they were able to document.
  - HHS will in turn submit an aggregate report on the result of these Title IV-E training evaluations to the Committee on Ways and Means in the House of Representatives and the Committee on Finance of the Senate no later than September 1 of each year.

### **III. Providing Incentives to Recruit and Retain Quality Staff in Child Welfare Agencies and Family Courts: Expanding Loan Forgiveness**

**Proposal:** Expand the current federal loan forgiveness programs to provide fiscal incentives for individuals to work with children in public or private non-profit child welfare agencies serving high-risk children and to attorneys working with low-income children and families in family court. This expansion will reduce or forgive the educational and law school loans of individuals who become and remain employed in child welfare agencies or family courts.

**Challenges Addressed by Loan Forgiveness:** According to the General Accounting Office, 90 percent of states reported difficulty in recruitment and retention of child welfare staff. The average tenure of child welfare workers is less than two years. The turnover rate for full-time child welfare staff is 35 percent. Studies have documented the aging of the current child welfare staff and limited success by agencies in attracting professionals to child welfare. Courts too often face challenges in attracting attorneys to represent children who have been abused and neglected. Loan forgiveness programs can help to enhance recruitment and retention efforts in public and private agencies and in family court.

**Goal of the Proposal:** Expanded loan forgiveness programs will help to improve the recruitment and retention of qualified individuals to provide services to children and families in public and private non-profit child and family service agencies serving high-risk children and to represent children and parents in child welfare matters in family court.

#### **Challenges with the Current Loan Forgiveness Program:**

- The current program of loan forgiveness for Perkins student loans provides loan cancellation for employees of eligible public or private nonprofit child or family service agencies who are providing or supervising the provision of services to both high-risk children who are from low-income communities and the families of such children. High-risk children are those under the age of 21 who are low-income or are at risk of abuse or neglect, have been abused or neglected, have serious emotional, mental or behavioral disturbances, reside in placement outside their homes, or are involved in the juvenile justice system. Low-income communities are those in which there is a high concentration of children eligible to be counted under Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965.
- The current loan forgiveness program for staff of child and family service agencies applies only to Perkins loans and does not offer incentives to attorneys who represent low-income families or individuals involved in court in family or domestic relations matters, including child abuse or neglect, adoption, domestic relations, child support, paternity, or juvenile justice cases.

### **Specifics of the Proposal:**

- Maintain and expand the current Perkins Loan Forgiveness Program:
  - In addition to staff in public or private nonprofit child or family service agencies serving high-risk children, the proposal will extend loan forgiveness to attorneys who represent low income families or individuals involved in court in family or domestic relations matters, including child abuse or neglect, adoption, domestic relations, child support, paternity, or juvenile justice cases.
  - Cancellation of the student loans will take place over five years, with 15 percent each of the first and second years, 20 percent each the third and fourth years, and 30 percent the fifth year.
- Expand loan forgiveness programs that currently apply to two other large federal loan programs so that they also apply to staff in public and private nonprofit child and family service agencies and attorneys representing low-income families or individuals involved in the child welfare system in family court. The two federal loan programs are: the Federal Family Education Loans, including the Stafford loans, both subsidized and unsubsidized, Federal PLUS loans, and consolidation loans; and the William D. Ford Federal Direct Loans, including the subsidized and unsubsidized Stafford/Ford loans, the Federal Direct PLUS loans, and the Federal Direct consolidation loans.
- Require the U.S. Department of Education to post information on its Web site about the availability of the new loan forgiveness programs and to notify institutions of higher education that participate in the applicable student loan programs about the loan forgiveness programs. In addition, the U.S. Department of Education and Children's Bureau shall send a joint memorandum to public child welfare agencies and to organizations of private non-profit child welfare agencies notifying them of the availability of the expanded loan forgiveness programs.
- Require the U.S. Department of Education to evaluate the new loan forgiveness programs, after they have been operational for at least two full years, to determine, at minimum, the program's impact on the educational levels of staff, retention rates, and whether it is possible to assess the impact of the staff benefiting from the program on outcomes for the children and families they serve or represent.

### **Examples of Loan Forgiveness in Other Professions:**

- Currently different federal loan forgiveness programs attach to several of the federal student loan programs. They assist early childhood education and child care providers, staff of child and family service agencies, selected Head Start program staff, teachers, early intervention specialists for children with disabilities, law enforcement and corrections officials, Peace Corps and VISTA volunteers, and selected members of the armed forces to offset or cancel the costs of their student loans.



#### **IV. Increasing Accountability in the Child Welfare Workforce: Improving the Quality of Federal Child Welfare Data**

**Proposal:** Modify the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) so that data will be collected longitudinally and unique identifiers will be assigned to each child and worker, accordingly allowing the tracking and monitoring of their experiences. Require the Secretary of Health and Human Services (HHS) to establish a national working group and an advisory panel to assist HHS in establishing and implementing the improved data system.

**Challenges Addressed:** Federal and state governments have invested significant resources in building a rich storehouse of information on children and families in the child welfare system. However, data irregularities and the inability to track child and family outcomes longitudinally in the current federal AFCARS have greatly hampered federal monitoring of state and national performance. This in turn makes it difficult to assess the effectiveness of the child welfare workforce in helping achieve positive outcomes for children and families.

**Goal of the Proposal:** These modifications to AFCARS will help promote greater accountability in relation to the child welfare workforce by encouraging the development of a results-oriented and evidence-based system. Nationally standardized data on child and family outcomes is central to achieving this goal.

##### **Specifics of the Proposal:**

- AFCARS will be revised so that data are collected longitudinally.
- AFCARS will be revised so that a unique identifier will be assigned to each child in foster care so that each child and each child's placements can be tracked over time, with data reported accordingly to HHS.
- AFCARS also will assign a unique identifier to each caseworker in order to enable a determination of the number of caseworkers assigned to each child over time, the movement of the worker throughout the system, and the outcomes for the children to whom the worker is assigned.
- AFCARS also will collect aggregate data on the demographics of the child welfare workforce. The data should include, at a minimum, the age, race, ethnicity, level of education, and tenure in child welfare, including the major responsibilities assigned, for each of the workers, supervisors, and administrators.
- The Secretary of HHS will establish a national working group to codify standards for data elements and to develop a curriculum to train states in submitting standardized AFCARS data that can be analyzed in a longitudinal fashion. Special attention will be given to indicators that will help link workforce improvements to enhanced child and family outcomes.
- The Secretary of HHS will also appoint an AFCARS advisory group to suggest revisions to current outcome measures, recommend relevant changes in data

collection procedures, provide guidance on assessing state performance, and annually evaluate the quality of AFCARS to make recommendations for continuing improvement of the quality of the child welfare system. Special attention shall be given to improving the child welfare workforce in the composition of the group and in decisions about data changes and outcome measures.

## **V. Looking More Comprehensively at Workforce in the Child and Family Service Reviews**

**Proposal:** Modify the Child and Family Service Reviews (CFSRs) to provide for a more comprehensive look at child welfare workforce concerns as they impact outcomes for children and families.

**Challenges Addressed:** The Child and Family Service Reviews assess states' child welfare programs based on seven specific outcomes for assessing safety, permanence, and well-being, six national standards related to safety and permanence, and seven system requirements. However, staff training is the only component of the child welfare workforce that is addressed specifically in the CFSRs. In its review of findings from the CFSRs, the General Accountability Office noted that, in the majority of states, one or more workforce deficiencies (high caseloads, training deficiencies, and staffing shortages) were cited as affecting attainment of outcomes. A subsequent review by the Children's Defense Fund and Children's Rights of states' Program Improvement Plans found that workforce improvements were noted frequently as states discussed their strategies for addressing the deficiencies in outcome areas identified in the CFSRs.

**Goal of the Proposal:** Research indicates that developing and sustaining a knowledgeable, skilled child welfare workforce able to successfully deliver quality services and supports is critical for ensuring positive outcomes for vulnerable children, youth, and families. States' Program Improvement Plans reinforce the importance of child welfare workforce improvements to their success in making other quality improvements in their system to improve outcomes for children and families. The quality of child welfare practice is negatively impacted by a variety of workforce challenges, which then in turn negatively impact outcomes for children and families. Workforce challenges must be more thoroughly assessed.

**Specifics of the Proposal:** To make the CFSR and PIP processes more helpful in promoting workforce improvements to enhance outcomes for children, the CFSRs should examine more comprehensively and specifically than they do currently the steps states are taking to address the key components of an effective child welfare workforce. The system outcome that currently addresses only staff training should be amended to elaborate on staff training and address several additional workforce concerns. At a minimum, the following measures should be included:

- **Staff preparation, training, and development**
  - Numbers and type of staff and supervisors trained
  - Frequency and nature of the training and competencies sought
  - Effectiveness of both pre-service and in-service training
  - How training helps promote improved outcomes for children
  - Educational qualifications of the child welfare workforce and how they are used in making staff assignments
  
- **Resources available to support the workforce**
  - Current actual caseloads in the various areas of child welfare practice

- Procedures used for calculating the caseloads and establishing caseload standards
  - Staff turnover at all levels, how turnover is calculated, and steps taken to reduce turnover
  - Steps being taken to promote recruitment and retention of workers and supervisors
- **Steps to connect staff to families and their communities**
    - Procedures, practices, and policies that help staff engage with families and children and their communities
    - Impact of these activities on cultural competence of staff and on outcomes for children from different racial and ethnic backgrounds, including racial and ethnic disproportionality.