



NATIONAL ADVOCACY SUMMIT

*Investing in What It Takes:
A Full Continuum of Care*



★ April 18–20, 2016 ★ Hilton Garden Inn Washington, DC / U.S. Capitol ★

HOT TOPIC

Strengthen and Increase the Child Welfare Workforce

ACTION

- **Support the FY 2017 budget proposal to strengthen and expand the child welfare workforce** by simplifying state access to Title IV-E training funds and incentivizing the hiring of child welfare workers with Bachelor's and Master's Degrees.

INFORMATION

The Administration's FY 2017 budget request includes a proposal that allows state child welfare agencies greater access to current Title IV-E training funds for child welfare workers.

Title IV-E training funds are currently available for long-term training costs, including costs for persons preparing for employment or actually employed by the Title IV-E child welfare agency. Training funds can also be used by non-profit child welfare agencies.

Through a complicated formula states are able to draw a match of 75 percent for a child welfare worker's training costs based on how much of that caseworker's caseload is covered by federal foster care funding (Title IV-E). That means that before a state can apply a federal match of 75 percent in the training of public and private agency child welfare workers they must determine how much of that worker's time is spent to assist children who are eligible for Title IV-E foster care and/or adoption assistance.

For example if 50% of a worker's caseload or children are IV-E eligible or covered by federal foster care funds, 50 percent of that workers training would be eligible for a 75% match. The Administration proposal would do away with this complex process.

This proposal would eliminate the need for states to determine how much of a child welfare worker caseload is dedicated to IV-E eligible foster children and instead let states charge appropriate training costs regardless of the makeup of the caseload.

The new proposal would be tied to training related to obtaining either a BSW or MSW degree. The proposal decreases the financial burden on states and incentivize them to support and promote better trained child welfare workers.

A second part of this proposal would incentivize the hiring of qualified child welfare workers, by providing an enhanced Title IV-E administrative match for BSW/MSW caseworkers. A better educated workforce will result in positive permanency outcomes for children in foster care and children who are at-risk of entering foster care.

Why the Child Welfare Workforce is Important

A well-trained and well-staffed child welfare workforce is vital to all the goals we all agree are important. Reforms enacted by Congress in recent years including screening victims of sex trafficking, reducing psychotropic medications, expanding kinship care, finding more foster parents, enhanced foster parent training, increasing adoptions, more direct consulting with youth in foster care, addressing substance use and mental health needs within families, and entering new data are all dependent on the caseworker.

Child welfare work is labor intensive. Workers must engage families through face-to-face contact, assess children's safety and well-being through physical visits, monitor progress, ensure families receive essential services and supports, help with problems that develop, and fulfill data collection and reporting requirements.

According to a survey of New York City cases conducted in 2009, responsibilities of foster care caseworkers include but are not limited to:

- Engaging and working with children and families and others to develop and implement case plans designed to achieve the identified permanency goal;
- Conducting assessments and arranging for necessary services for children and families;
- Having regular contact with children in order to ensure their safety and well-being;
- Ensuring that children's health, mental health, and educational needs are addressed;
- Having regular contact, developing a rapport, and working with parents toward reunification with their children;
- Arranging regular visits between children in foster care and their parents;
- Identifying and exploring kinship resources who may serve as supports to parents or become placement resources, if necessary;
- Facilitating relationships between parents and resource parents;
- Providing support to resource and pre-adoptive families;
- Helping to identify and recruit adoptive resources for children;
- Responding to emergencies;
- Preparing court reports summarizing progress toward permanency goals and attending court hearings; and
- Entering data and progress notes in the information system.

The work of addressing child abuse and neglect, foster care, kinship care and adoption is difficult and challenging work but it is vital to the 415,000 children in foster care and the more than 107,000 waiting to be adopted. This work gets even more challenging if staff is not well-trained and supported. Lack of support and training only increases turnover which makes all of this work more difficult and that in turn makes better outcomes for children — less time in care, fewer youth aging out, more permanence and more adoptions — all less likely.

KEY FACTS

- According to an in-depth survey of New York City cases, 18% of children had one consistent case planner during a two-year period, 23% had two case planners and 51% of children had three or more case planners.
- According to the National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-Being II baseline report, 75% of caseworkers earned an annual salary between \$30,000 and \$49,999.
- The majority of caseworkers hold a Bachelor's degree (52.3%) or a Bachelor's of social work degree (21.9%). Only 25% of caseworkers hold a Master's degree.
- Child welfare workforce turnover rates are estimated to be between 23% and 60% annually across private and public child welfare agencies.
- In one New York State study, case workers spend under half of their time in direct contact with families and children. Nearly one third of time was spent in documentation such as the automated child welfare information systems. Over twelve percent was spent in travel, and the remaining time spent in case-supportive activities.

CONCLUSION

A quality child welfare workforce is essential to ensure good outcomes for children in the child welfare system. No issue has a greater effect on the capacity of the child welfare system to serve at-risk and vulnerable children and families than the shortage of a competent, stable workforce.

This shortage affects agencies in every service field including foster care, adoption, child protective services, child and youth care, social work, and support and supervision. The timely review of child abuse complaints, the monitoring and case management of children in foster care, the recruitment of qualified adoptive and foster families, and the management and updating of a modern, effective data collection system all depend on a fully staffed and qualified child welfare workforce.

Better and increased training is vital to developing and maintaining a quality child welfare workforce.



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