

# What is the ProtectOhio Title IV-E Waiver?

## A national experiment

To respond to challenges that traditional federal financing of child welfare is outdated and does not support best practice, Congress authorized the US Department of Health and Human Services to approve cost neutral waivers that proposed innovative strategies of using federal funding to better achieve child safety, stability and permanency. Ohio took advantage of the opportunity and proposed a broad, comprehensive waiver of Title IV-E Foster Care Maintenance Funds, called ProtectOhio. Foster Care Maintenance funds, previously only available to pay for out-of-home care, can be used flexibly on any child welfare service.

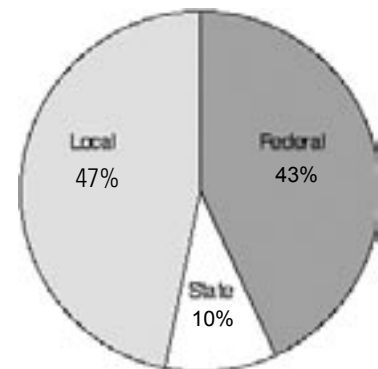
## What about the risk of changing an entitlement?

Participation in the ProtectOhio Title IV-E waiver is a risk, and counties carefully studied their cost history, anticipated trends and agency capacity to embrace change. To respond to concerns of wild swings that would hit a region or the state, there was an inflator/deflator element in the formula comparing participating counties with unnamed like counties, and minor reconciliations were made at the end of each year.

## What funding is available for child welfare in Ohio?

Ohio's child protective services are heavily dependent upon local support, either as part of a county's general budget, or as voted on in a local levy. The state only provides 10% of the cost of child welfare in Ohio. There is a 43% investment by the federal government.

State Fiscal Year 2003  
TOTAL: \$756,693,818



## What were the outcomes from the first six years of ProtectOhio?

- While participating counties did not experience fewer children coming into care, they did show shorter lengths of stay for children in care. Thus, immediate safety concerns were not compromised, but agencies quickly put essential services in place to facilitate the restoration of a safe home to return to, as well as more intense services to families after a reunification. The longer children are out of their own home, the more traumatic the experience becomes.
- When children needed to be out of their own homes, kinship families were more heavily recruited -- either for temporary care while reunification plans were achieved, or for longer placements if reunification plans did not progress.
- Overall, counties spent less on placement costs than their original budget projected, but more on supportive services to those same children and families.
- ProtectOhio counties also reported a higher level of multi-system collaboration, facilitating more effective services, and less duplication and conflict of services.
- ProtectOhio counties can also point to many more positive programs for the children in their counties -- such as visitation centers, creation of Life Books so children in out-of-home care maintain records of their life histories; innovative strategies to partner with juvenile courts for diversion of unruly children, and enhanced support of non-licensed kinship homes.

## How does the budget work?

Based on historical placement costs (number of placement days used times the average per diem cost), "budgets" based on anticipated federal costs were established,

## Who currently is in the ProtectOhio Consortium?

Ashtabula, Belmont, Clark, Crawford, Fairfield, Franklin, Greene, Hamilton, Lorain, Medina, Muskingum, Portage, Richland and Stark counties

While only 14 of 88 Ohio Public Children Services Agencies participate in Ohio's Title IV-E Waiver, they comprise one-third of Ohio's child welfare population.

## Accountability and continuous quality improvement

As mandated by Congress, HHS has completed a formal process -- known as the Children & Family Service Reviews (CFSRs) -- to evaluate state child welfare systems against a set of defined performance standards. Ohio, like all the other forty-nine states, fell below the 95% compliance benchmark - which under law, threatens to reduce every state's share of federal child welfare funding.

Accountability and more flexible use of federal funding must go hand-in-hand. As Ohio agencies are dependent upon local support, they are no stranger to accountability. In keeping with efforts for continuous quality improvement, Ohio used the CFJR as an opportunity to design an aggressive Program Improvement Plan (PIP).

In fact, all 88 Public Children Services Agencies in Ohio undergo a regular review as part of the Child Protection Oversight and Evaluation (CPOE) review, which measures many of the same outcomes as the federal CFJR. And each county in Ohio has their own Quality Improvement Plan (QIP).

Many state officials and child welfare advocates believe that current federal funding rules severely limit their ability to innovate in ways that could help states reform their foster care systems and meet the federally defined performance standards for our common goals of safety, permanency and stability for children.

and participating counties accepted the risk of a fixed budget to receive full flexibility for utilizing the funds (on any child welfare purpose).

The ProtectOhio waiver only addresses Foster Care Maintenance funds. A state or local maintenance of effort must be shown.



HHS has just renewed the waiver for another five years, effective October 2004. This will allow additional county agencies the option of joining the consortium in early 2006.

## Have there been other innovative ideas like ProtectOhio?

Sixteen states have had waivers besides Ohio. While several show great promise, Illinois demonstrated clear success with their guardianship subsidy program, which utilized federal funding to support permanent placements in relative and kinship families. The program, modeled after adoption subsidies, ensured permanent stable homes for many abused or neglected children that could not return home, but lived in a temporary arrangement with relatives. Stability was established for the child, families could live without government intervention and child protection agencies could close the case, thus saving administrative costs.

## Given the success of waivers, is it time to reform federal financing?

The Pew Commission on Children in Foster Care convened a group of experts to study that exact question, and after 18 months of intense research, focus groups and consideration, they released comprehensive finance reform recommendations, incorporating basic principals found in Ohio's waiver, Illinois' waiver, and others. Like ProtectOhio, many want change, but no change comes without risk. We all know the saying -- "the only person who likes change is a baby".

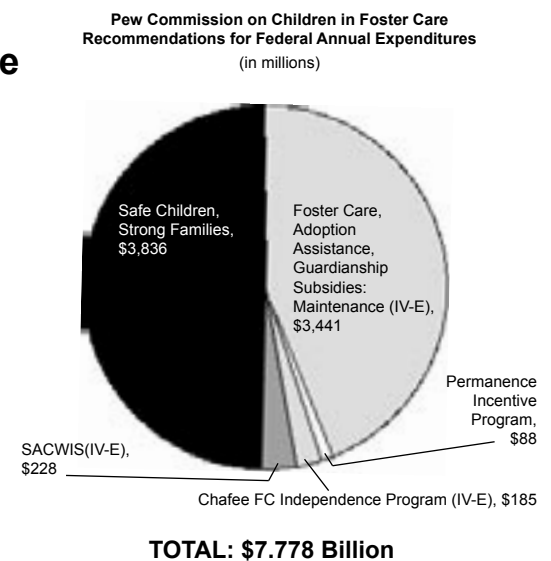
## Why do we need flexible child welfare financing?

Traditional federal funding rules serve as a straitjacket to state and local efforts to reform our troubled foster care systems. While removing children from their own homes and placing in foster care is often required to ensure child safety, it is only half the job. We also need to provide services to prevent removals, promote a safe return home, or support other permanent, stable arrangements for children such as legal guardianship or movement toward adoption.

States are currently primarily reimbursed by the federal government for caring for children in foster care, but extremely limited in their ability to spend those same federal dollars on essential support services like intensive in-home counseling, homemaker services, or alternatives like subsidized guardianship that give abused and neglected children more stable, permanent homes.

## Pew Commission on Children in Foster Care

The Pew Commission recommends flexibility in federal funds - give states and counties the incentive to change their practice - to provide more services to keep children out of care, promote a safe return home sooner or establish permanency in temporary kinship homes. Currently, only 5% of federal funds are available for flexible use (the current Title IV-B allocation.) The Pew recommendations allow 50% of the funds to be flexible, as part of the Safe Children, Strong Families grant. In addition, if states or counties don't use all their foster care placement funds on placement costs, they would be allowed to re-invest in other services. Much like the foundation of ProtectOhio!



## During the next five years, what will be ProtectOhio's common strategies?

The ProtectOhio Consortium has committed to using their flexible funding to implement promising strategies to improve child welfare outcomes - strategies they might not have funds to support without the flexibility of the waiver.

### Family Team Meetings

All consortium counties are committing to make available trained facilitators to hold decision making and planning meetings, with the family, a community member/advocate, caseworker, and other service providers. These meetings will be held prior to placement (or immediately after emergency placements), prior to sign off on the case plan, at regular intervals to check progress on the case plan, and prior to a reunification or permanency decision.

### Kinship Support and Permanency Strategies

Consortium counties are also committed to implementing various strategies to promote permanency for children in relative / kinship homes and those in Planned Permanent Living Arrangement homes. Strategies could include guardianship subsidies, and a more aggressive offering of immediate and non-cash supports.

### Family Visitation Strategies

The frequency, duration and quality of activities available during parent visitations for children in out of home care, have been shown to positively affect a parents' progress in achieving their case plan goals so children can be returned home. ProtectOhio counties are committing to enhancing the quality of supervised visitations -- turning them into teaching and bonding moments, as well as accelerating the frequency and duration of visits.