

State

Recommendations for the State of Ohio

With support of the National Governors Association and Casey Family Services, exciting efforts are underway to reform the child welfare system to reduce the numbers of children coming into care, reduce their length of stay and reduce the number of those who leave foster care only to re-enter. Accomplishing this task will require multi-pronged strategies including focusing on up-front, strength-based family services, better support of relative caregivers, seeking permanent families and ensuring sustained connections for all our foster children and youth. Thus, PCSAO recommends the following specific child welfare related recommendations and broader agenda items to support healthy, wanted children and families:

1. Maintain Flexible Child Protection Funding.

Ohio provides only 8% of funds invested for safety, stability and permanency services. PCSAO is appreciative of the minimal budget cuts to this modest contribution, which compliments local and federal funds; however we need to improve on 2008 funding levels.

2. Maintain adequate, flexible funding for core safety net services and access to such services.

When the economy is weak, families struggle to meet their most basic needs according to Maslow's hierarchy – food, shelter, safety, and clothing. Cash assistance, nutritional assistance, child support and workforce development have hit budget lows, which have cut into real services for real families.

Benefits must be maintained and local agencies must have a workforce to connect families with available benefits. Adequate TANF and TANF to Title XX Funds are particularly critical, flexible funds for a strong child protection system.

3. Create a Budget Neutral Kinship Package.

Modest investments and policies to support relatives and other kin to care for children needing them is a huge diversion of costs and supports improved child outcomes. Continue and maintain the \$10 million per year Kinship Permanency Incentive investment for permanent kinship families and extend the duration of the program from three to five years. In addition, extend time limited Grandparent Caregiver Authorization Affidavits and Power of Attorney forms to other kin.

4. Enhance Transitional Youth / Higher Education policies.

Improved strategies can maximize college and child welfare partnerships for counseling, tutoring, and year round housing solutions. We can also maximize federal and state financial aid opportunities to create a Foster Youth Tuition Guarantee to “fill the gap” for tuition, fees and books.

5. Adopt CHIPS legislation.

An initiative of the Supreme Court of Ohio, CHIPS, or **Children In Need of Protective Services**, is a rewrite of the Ohio Revised Code dealing with child maltreatment. Thoughtful representatives of various systems contributed to this important legislation that will promote improved practice and legal review for safe children and stable, permanent families.

6. Extend the Tangible Personal Property Tax “hold harmless” schedule through 2010-11 Biennial Budget.

Loss of local revenue due to statewide tax changes is scheduled to begin in 2011. Given that the state's share of total child welfare costs is currently a modest 8%, Ohio relies upon local communities to contribute 49% of the total child welfare costs. We cannot ask homeowners to replace the lost TPPT revenues.

7. Invest in Prevention.

The Ohio Children’s Trust Fund specifically funds local and statewide prevention efforts with the goal of empowering families to positively parent their children, thereby preventing maltreatment. We must maintain local prevention investments for an alternative response model to child welfare intervention and for evidence-based programming, such as the Incredible Years parent training and Darkness to Light child sexual abuse prevention.

8. Prevent Unintended Pregnancies.

Ohio should amend our Medicaid Plan to include Family Planning Services inclusive of

education and contraception to ensure our young men and women carefully plan that most important decision – when to have a baby. Twenty-six other states have already moved forward, receiving a 90% federal reimbursement and showing significant cost savings by preventing the many costs associated with unintended pregnancies.

9. Support Early Childhood Care and Education.

The biennial budget outlines a comprehensive program to allow all children quality childhood development experiences, including Child Care, Head Start, Help Me Grow, the Early Learning Initiative, and preschool. The

revised Help Me Grow program will better target evidence-based services to at risk young families, thereby maximizing state resources and the federal EPSDT (Early Periodic Screening, Diagnosis, and Treatment) program to support this work – PCSAO will contribute to this evolution.

10. Build a system of Health, Social and Emotional Developmental Screens.

Tools and mechanisms exist, but better training and coordination between physicians, managed care companies and families is needed to ensure these screens are a regular part of health care for our children in the child protection system.

Federal Recommendations for the Federal Government

1. Eliminate the antiquated 1996 “look back” for Title IV-E eligibility.

All children deserve strong child protection services with federal support. The current system is not only eroding the percentage of children eligible, due to antiquated poverty standards, but it is discriminatory against large numbers of children.

2. Allow flexible federal Title IV-E funding.

Currently, federal funds are prioritized for child placement.

However, children will have improved outcomes if we can avoid, shorten and minimize out-of-home placement. States need federal funds for services to strengthen birth and relative families, not just to pay for foster care! Alternative Response is an excellent example of the need for flexible funds.

3. Invest resources in early childhood mental health and trauma related care for young children.

Science and research provide compelling evidence of the

adverse affect of trauma and child abuse on young children’s brain development, leading to serious health and mental health concerns throughout life. The federal government should reauthorize the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act with special attention to trauma informed care and the science of early brain development; target investments in specialized, evidence-based interventions; establish a White House Office for Children; and reframe childhood trauma and child abuse as public health issues.