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Major Grant Will Fund Study to Improve the Lives of Children in Foster Care

The Public Children Services Association of Ohio is Part of a National Grant to Study the Effects of Funding on Health and Well-being Outcomes for Abused and Neglected Children

Columbus, OH – Making tax dollars devoted to child welfare work most effectively for children is the focus of a promising two-year study that will use data collected by the Public Children Services Association of Ohio (PCSAO). The grant is in partnership with the Research Foundation of State University of New York on behalf of University at Buffalo (SUNY-Buffalo) and is one of 15 grants recently awarded by Public Health Law Research (PHLR), a national program office of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF).

The project addresses the question: Does the source and/or type of funding, not just the amount of funding, affect health outcomes for children in foster care? The study will examine 10 years' worth of data from the 88 counties in Ohio, 45 of which have dedicated local tax levies that provide flexible local child welfare funding. Eighteen other counties have unusual flexibility in how they spend federal funding for children in foster care, as part of the ProtectOhio Title IV-E Waiver experiment by the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). The quality outcomes under study include number of days spent in foster care, days a child waits before he or she is adopted, and cases of recurrent maltreatment. HHS uses these factors to measure the quality of child welfare programs across the country.

"We are extremely honored to have been selected as a grantee of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's PHLR program," said Crystal Ward Allen, PCSAO's Executive Director. "This is one of many examples of the nation looking to Ohio as a leader and innovator. Budget stresses, the public's continuing dedication to child safety and permanency, and PCSAO's history of promoting data-driven policy investments allow Ohio to be uniquely positioned to contribute valuable research aimed at improving the lives of hundreds of thousands of children nationwide."

Allen stated, "Ohio is only one of thirteen state-supervised, county-administered child welfare systems in the nation, and our funding system is heavily dependent upon local and federal investment. We are very proud to be fiscally accountable – depending upon the generosity of local taxpayers every few years -- and Ohio recently earned a 96+% compliance rating on our federal Title IV-E eligibility review. However, inequities are widening between counties that provide local levy support for child protective services and those counties that do not. According to a recent analysis, the average per-child population child welfare investment in Ohio in year 2009 was \$344 per child; yet 16 counties had less than a \$110 per-child investment."

Greg Kapcar, PCSAO's co-project director for this grant, said, "Early results show a high correlation between flexible funding and improved child outcomes. For instance, in counties that do not have flexible local or federal funds, children waited seven years to be adopted, on average; however, in those counties with both flexible local and federal funds, children waited less than a year to be adopted. We have a treasure trove of child welfare data that we publish every two years in our *PCSAO Factbook*. We're ecstatic to be partnering with a team of academics, statisticians and researchers who will help us examine the data in much greater detail."

Susan Vivian Mangold, co-director of the Program for Excellence in Family Law at SUNY Buffalo Law School and lead project director for this grant, stated, “We appreciate the opportunity to join with PCSAO to conduct this valuable research. The question now is, what can we learn from the early results and correlations between funding and outcomes? Why does the funding source make any difference?”

Scott Burris, JD, Director of PHLR, said, “Public health law research usually focuses on the substantive laws that affect health, not the accompanying funding law – which is what makes the Ohio project so unique. Each time we fund a new set of studies, we anticipate that the evidence will reach the policy debate. PHLR’s objective is to be the place to go for answers to public health policy questions.” Burris is professor of law at Temple University in Philadelphia, where he directs the Center for Health Policy, Law and Practice.

The **Public Children Services Association of Ohio** is a membership-driven association serving Ohio’s 88 County Public Children Services Agencies through the support of program excellence and sound public policy for safe children, stable families and supportive communities. We do this through member dialogue, active sharing of information, building partnerships, research, training and technical assistance, and advocacy at the state and federal level. More information about PCSAO is available at www.pcsao.org.

Public Health Law Research is funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation as a part of the foundation’s targeted public health strategy which includes a focus on advancing the use of law and policy to improve health, and supporting research that enables public health officials and policy makers to make informed decisions to better protect the health of their communities. For more information on PHLR visit www.phlr.org.

The **Robert Wood Johnson Foundation** focuses on the pressing health and health care issues facing our country. As the nation’s largest philanthropic organization devoted exclusively to improving the health and health care of all Americans, the Foundation works with a diverse group of organizations and individuals to identify solutions and achieve comprehensive, meaningful and timely change. For more than 35 years, the Foundation has brought experience, commitment, and a rigorous, balanced approach to the problems that affect the health and health care of those it serves. When it comes to helping Americans lead healthier lives and get the care they need, the Foundation expects to make a difference in your lifetime. For more information about RWJF, visit www.rwjf.org.

The **University at Buffalo** is a premier research-intensive public university, a flagship institution in the State University of New York system and its largest and most comprehensive campus. UB’s more than 28,000 students pursue their academic interests through more than 300 undergraduate, graduate and professional degree programs. Founded in 1846, the University at Buffalo is a member of the Association of American Universities.

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