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## Addressing the Needs of Ohio's Multi-System Youth

### Who are Multi-System Youth?

Multi-system youth are those in need of services from two or more of the following systems: child protective services, mental health and addiction services, developmental disabilities services, and juvenile court. While each of these systems provides services to youth, Ohio's child protection system is often accessed as the means to provide care for multi-system youth when other agencies lack the resources to meet their high intensity, high cost needs. Specifically, federal dollars known as the Title IV-E Foster Care Program<sup>1</sup> can provide partial reimbursement for room and board for eligible youth who are in agency custody and need residential treatment. Across all systems, this is the only federal entitlement funding stream that can be used for these purposes, contributing to the use of the child protection system as the "last resort" when youth need residential treatment and other funding sources are exhausted. In some cases, these children have no history of abuse or neglect, yet they end up in a system designed to focus on child safety and permanency rather than serving as a means to access appropriate behavioral health and habilitation/rehabilitation services.<sup>2</sup> Consequently, child protective services agencies are not always professionally or financially equipped to handle multi-system youth on their own.

There are several pathways by which multi-system youth end up in the custody of the child protection system. Some parents are faced with the choice to forego the needed crisis, stabilization and treatment services for their child or give up custody of their child in order to access such treatment. Juvenile courts often divert youth to child protection when the need of the youth does not require a locked facility but either the public would not be safe with the juvenile remaining in the community or the youth requires a higher level of care than community-based in-home services can provide. Ohio needs a new approach to serving multi-system youth so that youths' needs and best interests, and not funding sources, drive services.

### Impact on Child Protective Services

1. *Many multi-system youth enter child protective services custody for reasons other than child abuse and neglect.*

Data show that many multi-system youth come into agency custody for reasons other than child abuse and neglect (CA/N). In state fiscal year 2013, while allegations of abuse and neglect accounted for eighty-two percent of reports that were investigated, six in ten children were in agency custody for primary reasons other than abuse and neglect.<sup>3</sup>

**Reports Screened-in to PCSAs**

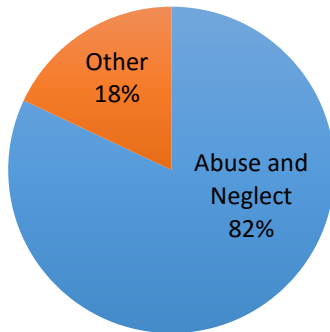


Figure 1: SFY 2013

**Reason for Children In PCSA Custody**

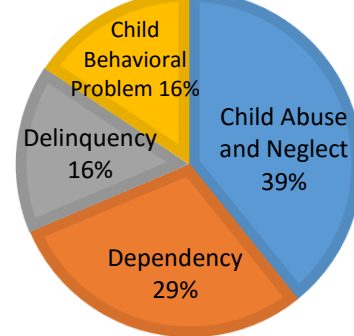
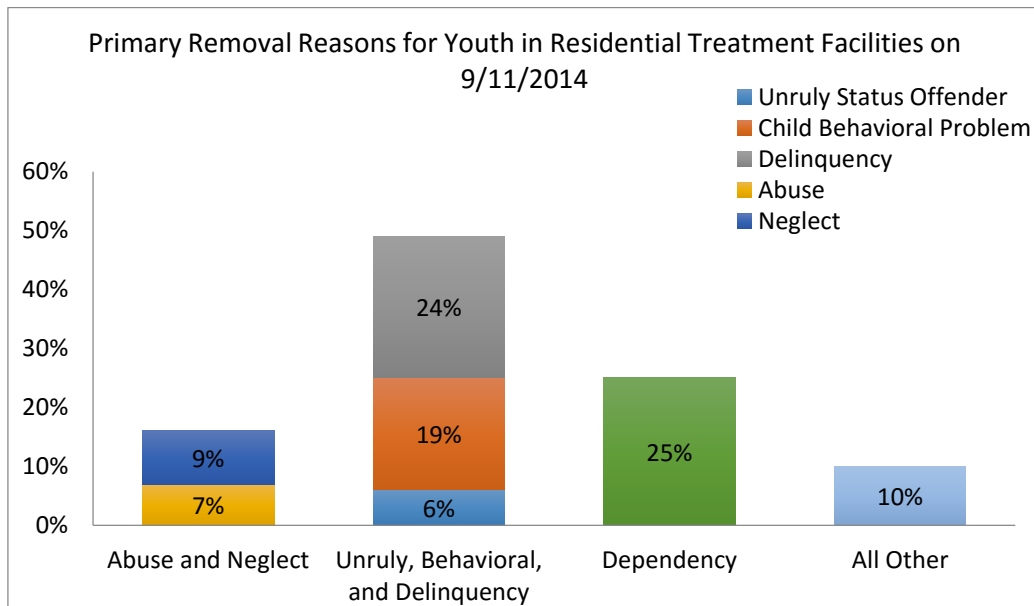


Figure 2: For children in custody on 1/1/14

Source: ODJFS SACWIS Data, received 4/15/2014. Additional calculations by PCSAO.

Furthermore, nearly half (49%) of the youth in residential treatment facilities were originally removed from their homes for primary reasons other than child abuse and neglect, including behavior problems, delinquency and unruliness.<sup>4</sup> This suggests that multi-system youth tend to be placed in more restrictive congregate care settings rather than in family-like settings such as foster care.



Source: ODJFS SACWIS data; 2,111 children in children’s residential center or group home on that day.

2. *Some parents relinquish custody of their child for the sole purpose of securing treatment services.*

Because of limits on private healthcare plans, parents are making the difficult decision to give up custody of their child to the county child protection agency so that their child can receive the behavioral health and developmental services they need.<sup>5</sup> Studies show that nationally, more than 12,700 children were placed into state custody via custody relinquishment in order to gain access to mental health services.<sup>6</sup> In Ohio, a manual review of children in agency custody in forty counties in the month of June 2015 found that nearly one in three (30%) of multi-system youth entered agency custody via custody relinquishment. Within the multi-system youth categories, 50% of youth with developmental disabilities, 36% with behavioral health issues, and 20% of youth with involvement in the juvenile justice system came into agency custody via custody relinquishment.

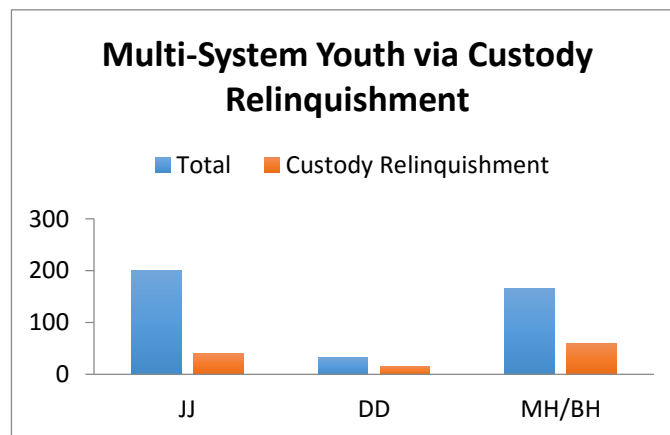


Figure 4: Comparison of multi-system youth in custody and youth who came into care due to custody relinquishment.  
Source: PCSAO survey of 40 county PCSAs, Summer 2015.

3. *High costs are associated with high intensity multi-system needs.*

Multi-system youth account for a high proportion of placement costs.<sup>7</sup> An analysis of children in custody in January 2015 in Ohio’s eight metropolitan counties found that nearly half (49%) of total placement costs that month were for multi-system youth.<sup>8</sup> Within placement settings, congregate care settings (group homes and children’s residential centers) are the most expensive. For example, average daily placement costs for children with diagnosed behavioral health characteristics ranged from \$219 to \$233 for group homes and from \$247 to \$280 for children’s residential centers.<sup>9</sup>

Placement costs are borne by a combination of federal and local dollars. Federal reimbursement is available for youth who are IV-E eligible, at a matching rate of approximately 63:37 (federal: local). In order to access IV-E funding, the child must be in the custody of the county public children services agency and meet certain family income standards. Local

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dollars pay the match for youth who are IV-E eligible, as well as for total costs for youth who are not IV-E eligible due to the family's income. A review of placement costs for multi-system youth in 40 counties (June 2015) found that 60% of all placement costs for multi-system youth are funded by local dollars.

4. *Multi-system youth in child protection custody are at greater risk of poor outcomes.*

Each year, approximately 800-1000 Ohio youth exit the child protection system at the age of 18. Of those that emancipate from care, 62% of the youth had come into custody due to reasons other than child abuse and neglect; with 30% due to dependency, 16% due to the child's behavior problem, and 16% due to delinquency.<sup>10</sup> In other words, many multi-system youth do not secure positive permanent outcomes such as adoption, guardianship, or reunification with their family. Without permanency and young adult supports, these youth are at greater risk of homelessness, criminal conduct, early parenthood, poor educational outcomes, and unemployment.

### Policy Considerations

Based on these data, Public Children Services Association of Ohio views the Joint Legislative Committee on Multi-System Youth as a renewed opportunity to address the challenges of this population and to secure better outcomes for their health and well-being. Specifically, PCSAO recommends the following:

- Ensure the State's Medicaid behavioral health services redesign will include intensive home-based services (e.g., IHBT), High-Fidelity Wraparound, respite, and crisis services that can help mitigate the need for residential care.
- Explore and create psychiatric residential treatment facility (PRTF) services under the state's Medicaid plan with safeguards built in to ensure residential care is only accessed when absolutely necessary and that children are stepped down to another setting that is least restrictive when appropriate.
- Address mental health parity in both private and public (Medicaid) insurance.
- Use lessons learned over the 25 years of the statutorily mandated Family and Children First to determine how best to leverage such a structure to coordinate and fund services for multi-system youth across all child-serving systems at the state and local levels.
- Follow the lead of other states like Virginia and Vermont and establish a state-level funding stream that can be accessed after all other options have been exhausted to offset the cost of residential room and board and provide non-traditional supports for multi-system youth.
- Improve the juvenile justice data collection, as very limited data exist for juveniles served through the county court system.
- Identify opportunities and strategies to reduce the cross-over population between juvenile justice and child protection such as creating a similar incentive program like RECLAIM for child protection and juvenile courts.
- Increase the proportion of RECLAIM funds (including RECLAIM, targeted RECLAIM and Competitive RECLAIM) that go to community-based services for youth with juvenile justice system involvement.
- Explore opportunities for the mental health and addiction services and developmental disabilities systems to take more responsibility for serving children and youth under age 21.

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## Endnotes

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- <sup>1</sup> Title IV-E of the Social Security Act provides federal dollars to states for child protective services activities. The Title IV-E Foster Care Program reimburses states for expenditures in three categories: 1) maintenance payments that cover the costs of shelter, food, and clothing for eligible children; 2) foster care placement services and administrative costs related to foster care, and 3) expenses related to training for staff and foster parents. In Ohio, local dollars are used as match for the IV-E program. The program is an open-ended entitlement, meaning that county public children services agencies receive a certain level of reimbursement from the federal government for every eligible claim submitted.
- <sup>2</sup> Joseph, R. 2011. Knowledge brief: how well is the child welfare systems serving youths with behavioral problems. MacArthur Foundation's Models for Change Research Initiative. Retrieved from [http://www.naco.org/sites/default/files/documents/05%20Knowledge Brief How Well Is the Child Welfare System Serving Youths with Behavioral Problems.pdf](http://www.naco.org/sites/default/files/documents/05%20Knowledge%20Brief%20How%20Well%20Is%20the%20Child%20Welfare%20System%20Serving%20Youths%20with%20Behavioral%20Problems.pdf)
- <sup>3</sup> Public Children Services Association of Ohio. 2015. PCSAO Factbook: 12<sup>th</sup> edition 2015-2016. Retrieved from <http://www.pcsao.org/pdf/factbook/2015/PCSAOFactbook.pdf>. Child & Custody Profiles. Ohio Department of Job and Family Services, Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information Systems (SACWIS), special data run. Received 4/15/2014. Additional calculations by PCSAO. Reviewed and updated by the County Public Children Services Agencies (PCSAs).
- <sup>4</sup> Ohio Department of Job and Family Services, Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information Systems (SACWIS), special data run. Retrieved on 9/11/2014. The review is based on the examination of data on youth placed in a Children's Residential Center (CRC) or Group Home (GH) on August 1, 2014.
- <sup>5</sup> Giliberti, M. and Schulzinger, R. 2000. Executive summary: Relinquishing custody. The tragic result of failure to meet children's mental health needs. The Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law. Retrieved from <http://www.bazelon.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=-hWbIbUX5v8%3d&tabid=230>
- <sup>6</sup> CHILD WELFARE AND JUVENILE JUSTICE: Federal Agencies Could Play a Stronger Role in Helping States Reduce the Number of Children Placed Solely to Obtain Mental Health Services (GAO-13-397, April 21, 2003). <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d03397.pdf>. Estimate based on national survey conducted in 2001. "Staying Together: Preventing Custody Relinquishment for Children's Access to Mental Health Services," Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law and Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health (1999) and "Relinquishing Custody: The Tragic Result of Failure to Meet Children's Mental Health Needs," Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law (2000), both available from Bazelon. PDF version of 1999 publication available at <http://www.bazelon.org/issues/children/publications/stayingtogether/staying2.pdf>.
- <sup>7</sup> Placement costs are defined as room and board/maintenance. They do not include the cost of services paid for by Medicaid.
- <sup>8</sup> Peasley, D. 2015. A child protection "multi-system" analysis of paid placement data for Ohio metropolitan counties: January, 2015. The eight major metro counties (Cuyahoga, Franklin, Hamilton, Lucas, Mahoning, Montgomery, Stark, Summit) account for nearly 60% percent of Ohio kids in custody.
- <sup>9</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>10</sup> ODJFS Emancipation Data; special data run provided January 2015. Additional calculations by PCSAO.