

# Child Welfare Policy Priorities 2016-17

## *Strengthening Families, Preventing Entry into Foster Care and Improving Outcomes for Children and Youth*

The Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy's child welfare priorities focus on family strengthening through prevention, engagement and policies that support youth.

### **Invest in Targeted Community-Based Family Strengthening**

New York State saw 45,927 indicated cases of child maltreatment in 2014.<sup>1</sup> Studies have shown, however, that the overwhelming majority of reports are cases of neglect, often connected to resource deprivation, rather than abuse.<sup>2</sup> At present, families must have a CPS case opened and be at risk of foster care in order to receive preventive services. A more effective approach includes an emphasis on primary prevention, aiming to stop maltreatment before it occurs by reducing the risk factors that put children at risk and increasing the factors that protect from risk. Funding for primary prevention has been dramatically cut and is restricted to programs that were funded at the time of the cuts in 2008. The State should invest in targeted, community-based family strengthening, by restoring State funding for preventive services to 65% (as is written in statute) and designating 3% of that funding for primary prevention focused toward high-need communities (as determined by relevant community-level data, such as poverty, maltreatment, etc.).

### **More, Better, and More Transparent Child Welfare Data**

Leaders understand that if we don't measure something, we can't manage it, and New York State has undertaken significant initiatives to measure and improve health care outcomes, but has minimally invested in understanding child welfare. In order to understand what works to improve child welfare, the State needs more and better data, particularly on child maltreatment prevention. The State should invest in significantly improving the collection, publication and sharing of data on prevention and post-adoption services offered in each county, demographic information on the families served, the cost per family, and the outcomes of those services.

### **Strengthen the Housing Subsidy Program**

Each year approximately 1,300 New York youth age out of foster care.<sup>3</sup> As many as one-third of youth who age out of foster care experience homelessness, and many more experience unstable housing arrangements.<sup>4</sup> To ensure the housing subsidy is better able to stabilize

housing for families and youth, the State should: increase the monthly housing subsidy allowance to \$600 (from \$300); increase the upper age limit eligibility from 21 to 24 so that youth who age out of foster care at 21 can avail themselves of the subsidy for up to 3 years; and allow youth receiving the housing subsidy to live with unrelated roommates.

### **Invest in Kin Care Services and Enhance the Kinship Guardianship Assistance Program (KinGAP)**

Relatives are usually a preferred caregiver for children who have been removed from their birth parents, as such placements help to maintain connections to family and culture. In a given year, approximately 5,000 children live in foster care with a relative caregiver,<sup>5</sup> while numerous other caregivers support kin outside of the formal foster care system. New York should support kinship families and cultivate permanent placements for children in foster care with family members through kinship services, as well as KinGAP. So that more families can take advantage of KinGAP the State should:

- Remove it from the Foster Care Block Grant and fund it like the adoption subsidy;
- Allow payments to continue until age 21 regardless of age of finalization;
- Use the same definition of kin as is used for kinship foster care, so that "fictive kin," such as godparents, are eligible.

### **Expand Family Assessment Response (FAR)**

In 2013, 144,333 families were investigated for maltreatment, while only 11,667 families across the state received services through Family Assessment Response (FAR),<sup>6</sup> an alternative to CPS that protects children by engaging families and providing support services without "indicating" a case. As of 2015, 21 counties are using FAR. Evaluations of FAR show better outcomes for children and families and FAR has been shown to have an impact on reducing racial disparity and disproportionality in child welfare.<sup>7</sup> Yet FAR is underutilized in NYS. The State should work with counties to ensure that FAR is implemented in a sustainable manner so that families may access it as an important family stability resource.

## Disproportionality in the Child Welfare System

Children of color continue to make up a disproportionate percentage of the total child welfare system.<sup>8</sup> In 2012, black children made up 24% of confirmed reports of maltreatment,<sup>9</sup> and 17% of the general population.<sup>10</sup> Non-Hispanic white children, on the other hand, made up 27%<sup>11</sup> of maltreatment cases and 70% of the general population.<sup>12</sup> While the State and counties have taken steps to begin to address this issue, more can be done to track what is working and share best practices. We urge the State to take a data-driven approach to disproportionality to track improvements, publish results and share best practices across counties. Counties that struggle to address disproportionality could learn from the efforts of those who have seen some success.

## A Strong and Supported Workforce

The child welfare workforce—from preventive services to Child Protective Services to foster care and beyond—is the backbone of a strong and supportive system. However, across New York State caseloads for these workers vary greatly—from average CPS caseloads of 20 in New York City to 27 in districts outside of New York City—well above the CPS caseload of 12 recommended by researchers.<sup>13</sup> The State must invest in and support a strong, well-qualified workforce across the state, with standardized caseloads, training, and consistent expectations of workers.

## Expand Access to Maternal, Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting Programs

Home visiting is a cost-effective two-generation intervention with proven benefits for children and families, and outcomes that cross disciplines—health, child welfare and education, but is unavailable in at least 16 counties across the state and, in other parts of the state, does not reach all families who may benefit from services.<sup>14</sup> Home visiting programs have been shown to reduce child maltreatment by up to 50%.<sup>15</sup> The State must improve coordination and measurement across programs, expand access, and increase funding for home visiting to **\$37.8 million**, which includes:

- \$27.8 million for Healthy Families NY
- \$5 million for Nurse-Family Partnership
- \$3 million for Parents as Teachers
- \$2 million for Parent-Child Home

## Raise the Age of Juvenile Jurisdiction

New York is one of only two states to automatically try all 16- and 17-year-olds as adults in the justice system. It is time for New York to raise the age of criminal responsibility. The State should support recommendations from the Governor's Commission on Public Safety and

Juvenile Justice to enact comprehensive legislation to raise the age of juvenile jurisdiction and better support the juvenile justice system so that children are treated as children.

## Support Foster Youth Attending College

Only two to seven percent of foster youth complete a two- or four-year degree. However, youth who graduate from college have a higher chance of securing and retaining employment in adulthood. The State must invest in our youth in foster care by renewing its investment in the Foster College Success Initiative and increasing funding to **\$4.5 million** to support youth pursuing higher education who either are or had been in foster care.

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> OCFS Bureau of Research, Evaluation and Analytics. 2014 *Monitoring and Analysis Profiles: New York State*. Retrieved from: <http://ocfs.ny.gov/main/reports/maps/counties/New%20York%20State.pdf>
- <sup>2</sup> See the Institute of Medicine: <http://iom.nationalacademies.org/Reports/2013/New-Directions-in-Child-Abuse-and-Neglect-Research.aspx>
- <sup>3</sup> Annie E. Casey Kids Count Data Center. 2014. *NY: Children Exiting Foster Care by Exit Reason*.
- <sup>4</sup> Housing for Youth Aging Out of Foster Care, US Department of Housing and Urban Development, May 2014, downloaded 11/29/15 from [http://www.huduser.gov/portal/publications/pdf/youth\\_hsg\\_main\\_report.pdf](http://www.huduser.gov/portal/publications/pdf/youth_hsg_main_report.pdf)
- <sup>5</sup> Annie E. Casey Kids Count Data Center. 2014. *NY: Children in Foster Care by Placement Type*.
- <sup>6</sup> New York State Citizen Review Panels for Child Protective Services. 2014 Annual Report and Recommendations.
- <sup>7</sup> Evaluations by the California Evidence-Based Clearinghouse for Child Welfare have ranked FAR as high in importance for reducing racial disparities and disproportionality in child welfare. For more, see: <http://www.cebc4cw.org/program/family-assessment-response/detailed>
- <sup>8</sup> NYS Office of Children & Family Services. 2011. The OCFS Initiative to Address Disproportionality in Child Welfare and Juvenile Justice.
- <sup>9</sup> Kids Count Data Center. NY: Children Who Are Confirmed By Child Protective Services As Victims Of Maltreatment By Race And Hispanic Origin.
- <sup>10</sup> US Census, Quick Facts. 2013 data: <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/36000.html>
- <sup>11</sup> KidsCount Data Center. NY: Children Who Are Confirmed By Child Protective Services As Victims Of Maltreatment By Race And Hispanic Origin.
- <sup>12</sup> US Census, Quick Facts. 2013 data: <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/36000.html>
- <sup>13</sup> New York State Office of Children & Family Services. (2006). *New York State Child Welfare Workload Study: Final Report*, submitted by Walter R. MacDonald & Associates.
- <sup>14</sup> See the Council on Children and Families' interactive maps, *Home Visiting in New York State*. <http://nysccf.maps.arcgis.com/apps/MapSeries/index.html?appid=888a5e7daa7448a3a4a6340152ad4daf>
- <sup>15</sup> Dumont, et al. (2010). Final Report: A Randomized Trial of Healthy Families New York: Does Home Visiting Prevent Child Maltreatment.