



Child Welfare Workforce and Training

ACTION

- Support legislation to extend federal training support (75% matching rate under Title IV-E of the Social Security Act) to train workers in approved private child welfare agencies that employ direct care workers, case managers, and others in the broad array of child welfare services.
- Support the Child Protection Services Improvement Act (H.R. 1371), which would offer new resources to state child welfare systems to improve the quality of services by increasing the quality and capacity of the workforce. It would also forgive loans to certain students who become child welfare workers.

HISTORY

The major federal child welfare programs include training supports. Training under Title IV-E of the Social Security Act is the largest and most important of these. An entitlement program, Title IV-E training allows states to claim a 75% federal match for allowable training of state and local agency staff and current and prospective foster and adoptive parents.

In recent years, some states have experienced significant problems in accessing and using Title IV-E training funds to support appropriate and needed training for staff in state-approved private agencies that meet federal eligibility criteria as child care institutions. This is a particular concern as states increasingly contract with private agencies to provide quality child welfare services and, ultimately, to improve outcomes for children and families in their care.

Federal law gives the secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) the authority to define which training activities and which entities can receive Title IV-E training reimbursements. In 1996, HHS requested public comment “concerning the implementation and management of child welfare training.” HHS has not issued any new guidance, however. The continued lack of clarification, as well as inconsistency in guidance given to the states, has forced public and private agencies to cobble together strategies to support needed training.

In 2000, the House of Representatives passed legislation that specifically extends training support with a 75% federal match under the Title IV-E foster care program to staff from state-licensed and appropriate private child welfare agencies. That legislation passed September 7, as an amendment, sponsored by Representative Jerry Weller (R-IL), to an omnibus child support bill. The Senate, however, did not complete action on this omnibus bill before the 106th Congress adjourned; the training provision will therefore be reintroduced in the 107th Congress.

New legislation has been introduced this year to improve the child welfare workforce. Sponsored by Representative Pete Stark (D-CA), the Child Protection Services Improvement Act (H.R. 1371) would authorize \$100 million per year for grants to state child welfare agencies and Indian tribes to improve working conditions, including increasing wages, hiring more staff, and improving the education and training of workers and supervisors. The bill also authorizes a five-year, \$10 million annual demonstration program to forgive school loans for students who become child welfare workers.

KEY FACTS

Successful outcomes for children and families in child welfare depend heavily on the quality of services received and, in turn, on the ability of the workforce delivering them. Yet, child welfare agencies nationwide are facing a workforce crisis on many fronts. Attracting, training, and retaining qualified staff at all levels has become an increasingly serious challenge.

Staff shortages and high turnover rates have grown with the increasingly rigorous demands of the work, low to modest compensation, and competition with more attractive options in the current job market. Child welfare workers must be prepared to handle caseloads typically well beyond recommended national guidelines. Every day, they work with children and families with complex problems and often in situations that may jeopardize their safety.

Training caseworkers and others involved in protecting and caring for abused and neglected children is vital to assessing whether a child can remain at home safely or should be removed. Often, if a child is to remain home, workers must make crucial decisions about what services are needed to ensure the child's continued safety and strengthen parental capacity. If a child is placed in foster care, workers must evaluate whether the child should return home or move to another permanent living situation.

Adequate training ensures that workers, supervisors, caregivers, and special advocates have the skills to make the best decisions and to carry out those decisions. Inadequately trained staff and others are ill-equipped to evaluate and make decisions about potentially life-threatening situations. Research affirms that well-trained, experienced, and well-supervised workers with manageable caseloads are best equipped to make good, prompt decisions about child safety, family capacity, and permanence.

- Turnover and vacancy rates among public and private child welfare agencies continue to increase. Nationally, annual turnover among human service direct support staff ranges from 30% to 70%.¹
- In 1999, state public child welfare agencies had an overall vacancy rate of 6%, compared with 4% in 1997, and an overall turnover rate of 15%, compared with 9% in 1997.²
- The problem is even more severe in private voluntary agencies, which had an overall vacancy rate of 8% (the same as in 1997) and an overall turnover rate of 27%, compared with 22% in 1997.³ Many programs and agencies report significantly greater staff vacancies and turnover.

SOURCES

1. Human Services Research Institute. (1997). *A plan to enhance and develop the direct support workforce*. Cambridge, MA: Author.
2. Child Welfare League of America. (2000). *CWLA 1999 salary study*. Washington, DC: Author.
3. Ibid.

CWLA CONTACT

Liz Meitner
202/942-0257
emeitner@cwla.org
www.cwla.org/advocacy



Child Welfare League of America
HEADQUARTERS
440 First Street, NW, Third Floor
Washington, DC 20001-2085
202/638-2952 • Fax 202/638-4004 • www.cwla.org