

Child Welfare Workforce and Training

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Child Welfare
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ACTION

- Support the Act to Leave No Child Behind (S. 940/HR 1990) 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.

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-serving 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 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) authority to define which training activities and which entities can receive Title IV-E training reimbursement. In 1996, HHS requested public comment "concerning the implementation and management of child welfare training." HHS, however, has not issued any new guidance. The continued lack of clarification and inconsistency in guidance 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 would have specifically extended 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. In 2001, that provision was included in the Act to Leave No Child Behind, which is now pending in both the House and Senate.

New legislation was also introduced in 2001 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 annually for grants to state child welfare agencies and tribal governments 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 and the ability of the workforce to deliver 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 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—often in situations that may jeopardize workers' 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 and carry out the best 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.
- In 2000, there was an overall vacancy rate of 9.3% among state public child protective service workers, and an 11.8% vacancy rate for other direct service caseworkers. Among private agencies, the rates were 10.9% and 11%.
- According to a recent survey, annual turnover among child protective service workers ranged from nearly 20% in state agencies to 40% at private agencies.
- For other direct service caseworkers, the turnover rate ranged from 19.4% in state agencies to 40.8% in private agencies.

SOURCE

* Alliance for Children and Families, American Public Human Services Association, Child Welfare League of America. (2001). [The child welfare workforce challenge: Results from a preliminary study, May 2001.](#) (Study conducted in collaboration among the authoring organizations.) Washington, DC: Authors.

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