



Child Welfare Workforce and Training

ACTION

- Support the Act to Leave No Child Behind 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, which would offer new resources to state child welfare systems to improve the quality of services by increasing workforce capacity. It would also forgive loans to certain students who become child welfare workers.

HISTORY

No issue has a greater effect on the capacity of the child welfare system to serve at-risk and vulnerable children and families than the shortage of a competent, stable workforce. This shortage affects agencies at every level, including child and youth care staff, social workers, and support and administrative staff.

A survey by CWLA and other organizations, as well as information from other sources, including the U.S. Department of Labor, confirms the workforce crisis in child welfare.¹ High staff turnover in public and private agencies, the loss of direct service and supervisory staff, and the expected retirement of most experienced administrators over the next 10 years exacerbates this crisis.

One way to address this issue is through increased training resources and opportunities. 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.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) defines which training activities and which entities qualify for Title IV-E training reimbursement. In 1996, HHS requested public comment "concerning the implementation and management of child welfare training," but HHS still 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 U.S. 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. That provision has been included in the Act to Leave No Child Behind, which has been reintroduced in 2003.

New legislation, originally introduced in the 107th Congress and reintroduced this year, would improve the child welfare workforce. Sponsored by Representative Pete Stark (D-CA), the Child Protection Services Improvement Act 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.²
- Between October 2000 and March 2001, average turnover rates in private agencies were 36% for direct staff and 38% for supervisors.³

- During this six-month period, the average turnover rates in public agencies were 20% for direct service staff and 8% for supervisors.⁴
- Private nonprofit agencies report an average supervisory turnover rate of 38%, compared with 8% for public agencies.⁵
- The average age of public chief child welfare administrators is 52.4 years. Nearly half (47%) expect to retire in the next five years, compared with 38% of public child welfare workers overall. Three-fourths of current public chief administrators expect to retire in the next 10 years.⁶
- The average age of private chief child welfare administrators is 52.5 years; 24% expect to retire in the next five years, compared with 19% of private child welfare workers overall. Nearly half of current private chief administrators expect to retire in the next 10 years.⁷
- 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 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.⁸
- 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 the family needs 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.⁹
- 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.¹⁰

SOURCES

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2. Ibid.
3. Drais-Parrillo, A. (2002). *2001 salary study*. Washington, DC: CWLA Press.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. ACF, APHSA, & CWLA. *The child welfare workforce challenge*.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.

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