

Child Welfare Workforce and Training

ACTION

- Maintain federal commitment to provide guaranteed support for training child welfare workers through the Title IV-E training program.
- Expand access to Title IV-E federal training funds so they support the training of all staff who are working with children and families who come to the attention of the child welfare system, including staff of private agencies, related child-serving agency workers, and court staff.
- Allow Title IV-E federal training funds to be used to provide training related to all activities that help promote safety, permanence, and well-being for children in the child welfare system.
- Remove the Title IV-E training restriction that allows these funds to be used only for training child welfare workers who are working with children eligible for federal Title IV-E Foster Care assistance.
- Support proposals that provide incentives, bonuses, and increased funding for states that meet or exceed national child welfare caseload standards.
- Support a national child welfare workload study that will assess and evaluate the workforce impact on outcomes for children and families in child welfare.
- Pass legislation that forgives educational loans to students who become child welfare workers.

HISTORY

A quality child welfare workforce is essential to ensure good outcomes for children in the child welfare system. 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 in every service field, including foster care, adoption, child protective services, child and youth care, social work, and support and supervision. The timely review of child abuse complaints, the monitoring and case management of children in foster care, the recruitment of qualified adoptive and foster families, and the management and updating of a modern, effective data collection system all depend on a fully staffed and qualified child welfare workforce.

Child welfare work is labor intensive. Workers must engage families through face-to-face contact, assess children's safety and well-being through physical visits, monitor progress, ensure families receive essential services and supports, help with problems that develop, and fulfill data collection and reporting requirements.

A comprehensive child welfare system cannot be maintained if the foundation of the workforce is crumbling. *CWLA Best Practice Guidelines* stipulate that the ideal caseload for child protection workers should not exceed more than 12-15 cases. Workers frequently have caseloads that are two, three, or even four times what good practice demands. The result is little time for training new hires, and no time for ongoing training. And supervision, though necessary, is often limited. These factors and more, including concerns about worker safety, create a workplace with high turnover and limited appeal when recruiting.

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The U.S. General Accounting Office (GAO) documented this crisis in the child welfare workforce, finding the child welfare system is seriously understaffed, undertrained, and undervalued. GAO found that workforce problems limit states' ability to meet the goals established in the mandated federal Child and Family Service Reviews (CFSRs), and stated that the analysis of the CFSRs "corroborates caseworkers' experiences showing that staff shortages, high caseloads, and worker turnover were factors impeding progress toward the achievement of federal safety and permanency outcomes."

CFSRs and the resulting state Program Improvement Plans (PIPs) present a clear picture of how workforce issues affect outcomes for children. Through this process, the federal government has found that states need additional workforce supports for making the improvements necessary to meet the needs of children and families. Most PIPs submitted to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) have addressed states' needs to improve workforce training, reduce caseloads, improve management, and provide better supervision.

TITLE IV-E TRAINING RECOMMENDATIONS

Increased training resources and opportunities is one way to improve the child welfare workforce. The major federal child welfare programs include some support for training. Training under Title IV-E of the Social Security Act, an entitlement program, is the largest and most important of these. 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 recent child welfare financing reform proposals would cap and combine these training funds into a block grant that states could use to provide services, cover administrative expenses, and supply training. Under these proposals, however, no funding would be designated for training and such proposals would mean that workforce training would have to compete for funding with other vital child welfare needs. Other proposals would expand the use of IV-E training funds for court personnel and extend training to private agencies contracted by the state child welfare agency.

Improvements and clarifications to the Title IV-E training program are necessary to improve child welfare practice and outcomes for children. HHS has offered inconsistent directions to states about the use of Title IV-E training funds and, as a result, states differ considerably on what

they do and what they have been told they can or cannot do with these funds.

- Title IV-E training should be extended to additional staff working with children in the child welfare system, including: permanent guardians and staff of group care settings for short-term training; staff of private state-licensed or state-approved child welfare agencies that provide services or care to foster and adopted children and children with guardians; court staff, including judges, judicial personnel, and staff of tribal courts; law enforcement personnel; agency attorneys; attorneys representing parents or children in proceedings conducted by or under the supervision of an abuse or neglect court; local or private nonprofit substance abuse prevention and treatment agencies; mental health providers; domestic violence prevention and treatment providers; health agencies; child care agencies; and school and community service agencies working with the state or local agency to keep children safe and provide permanent families.
- The purposes of the Title IV-E training need to be clarified. Current law refers to training foster or adoptive parents and group care staff to increase their ability to support and assist children in foster care and adopted children. Change is needed that will allow eligible training to include any training intended to help states meet federal goals of safety, permanence, and well-being for children.
- The current Title IV-E requirement that training expenditures be allocated in proportion to the percent of a state's caseload that is eligible for federal Title IV-E Foster Care assistance should be eliminated. This would allow states to use training funds for staff that are working with all children and families in the child welfare system to help them achieve safety, permanence, and well-being.

CASELOAD AND WORKLOAD STANDARDS RECOMMENDATIONS

Findings of the federal CFSRs point to more positive outcomes where child welfare workers have more contact with the children and families they serve. Despite such findings, and the clear connection between caseloads and workloads, service effectiveness, and caseworker retention, only limited efforts have occurred to ensure appropriate caseload sizes and national workload standards have been developed.

Child welfare agencies continue to experience high levels of caseworker turnover, resulting in repeated changes of caseworkers for children and families, a lack

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of continuity in services and planning, and poor outcomes for children and families. As a consequence, reducing caseworker turnover has come to be viewed as critical to child welfare workforce improvement.

Related to workforce retention is the need to attend to caseload (the number of clients for whom caseworkers have responsibility) and workload (the amount of time required to perform the range of tasks assigned to a caseworker). Appropriate caseloads and workloads are essential to strengthening the child welfare workforce. Although many jurisdictions have conducted caseload and workload assessments through time and travel studies (Allegheny County in Pennsylvania, the state of Arizona, and counties in South Dakota, for example), and some have developed caseload-weighting formulas and caseload allocation systems (New Mexico and Oregon, for example), these efforts are not national in scope.

- One element of a national strategy to enhance the child welfare workforce would be to offer incentives, bonuses, or higher federal reimbursements to child welfare programs that can reach national caseload standards. To reach this goal, states need new resources to ensure appropriate caseload standards, reduce caseworker turnover, and guarantee the appropriate credentials, training, and supervision of the child welfare workforce. CWLA has long recognized national caseload standards based on the type, category, and work required of the caseworker. Many states and local child welfare systems use CWLA standards as the basis for model legislation and policy.

Legislative proposals have begun to address these issues. In 2003, Representative Pete Stark (D-CA) introduced the Child Protection Services Workforce Improvement Act as a step toward improving the child welfare workforce. The legislation, awaiting reintroduction in 2006, sought to provide \$100 million annually to state child welfare agencies and tribal governments for improving working conditions, including increasing wages, hiring more staff, and improving the education and training of workers and supervisors. The bill also would have authorized a five-year, \$10 million annual demonstration program to forgive school loans for students who become child welfare workers.

Similar workforce proposals are now pending before Congress. The Leave No Abused and Neglected Child Behind Act (H.R. 357), sponsored by Congressman Jim McDermott (D-WA), contains many of the measures first introduced by Representative Stark. Congresswoman Stephanie Tubbs Jones (D-OH) has also introduced legislation (H.R. 127) that will provide loan forgiveness for child

welfare social workers. During the 2005 House debate on the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act (H.R. 609), Senator Robert Menendez (D-NJ) offered an amendment to provide a limited amount of loan forgiveness for social workers in child welfare. That amendment was included in the Higher Education legislation adopted by the House. That measure is still pending final approval. In the Senate, Senator Mike DeWine (R-OH) has introduced legislation (S. 1430) that includes loan forgiveness as a way to encourage and expand the child welfare workforce.

- National workload standards are also needed to provide additional support and direction to agencies across the country, enhancing their capacity to achieve desired caseloads.

KEY FACTS

- Between January 1, 2002 and January 1, 2003, the average turnover rate in private agencies was 45% for casework and case management positions, 57% for residential and youth care positions, and 44% for supervisors.
- Between October 2000 and March 2001, the average turnover rate in private agencies was 36% for direct service staff and 38% for supervisors.
- Between October 2000 and March 2001, the average turnover rate in public agencies was 20% for direct service staff and 8% for supervisors.
- Between October 2000 and March 2001, private nonprofit agencies reported an average supervisory turnover rate of 38%, compared with 8% for public agencies.
- In a 2003 GAO study, one-third of the 27 states reviewed cited workforce issues as a barrier to caseworkers' ability to maintain diligent efforts to provide services to families to protect children in the home and prevent removal.
- One-third of the states in the GAO study reported that workforce issues made it difficult for caseworkers to finalize adoptions with appropriate and timely efforts.
- Twelve states in the GAO report that they had problems with their caseworkers adequately monitoring safety and well-being through frequent visits with children, focusing on case planning, service delivery, and reaching goals for the family.

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- Social work education, supportive supervision, and job flexibility are associated with better work performance and higher retention rates.
- Less than one-third of staff employed in public child welfare agencies have a formal social work education.
- The poor image of child welfare agencies has an adverse effect on morale and retention of qualified employees.

Sources for statistical information are provided in the online version of this fact sheet. See www.cwla.org/advocacy/2006legagenda.htm.

C W L A C O N T A C T

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