

Promoting Safe and Stable Families Program

ACTION

- Reauthorize and increase funding to \$505 million for FY 2007 through 2012 for the Promoting Safe and Stable Families Program (Title IV-B part 2 of the Social Security Act).
- Ensure all funding for this program is protected as mandatory or guaranteed.
- Require states submit an annual expenditure report to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and Congress explaining how the funds are used.

HISTORY

Congress is preparing to reauthorize the Promoting Safe and Stable Families Program (PSSF) in 2006. The program, formerly the Family Preservation and Support Services Program, is an important federal flexible source of funding for an array of services for families with children. PSSF is one of the few federal sources for services aimed to prevent and remedy the difficulties that bring families to the child welfare system's attention. The program is also a critical component for reaching the goals of the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA). It helps build capacity in states so services are forthcoming for children and families. PSSF includes a set-aside for the State Court Improvement Program, which is intended to help courts implement reforms necessary to comply with ASFA decision-making timelines.

The PSSF program was created in 1993 and originally named the Family Preservation and Support program. At that time, all funding was guaranteed or mandatory, meaning the annual funding level was fixed and Congress did not need to approve appropriations annually.

PSSF was reauthorized in 1997 and renamed the Promoting Safe and Stable Families program. Prior to this, at least 90% of the funds were used for family preservation and community-based family support services. The 1997 reauthorization added two additional service categories: time-limited reunification

services and adoption promotion and support services to the existing family preservation and family support services. Since 1997, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) has issued program guidance, stating that states' allocation of less than 20% to any of the four types of services requires a strong rationale.

The program was last reauthorized in 2002. At that time, two separate funding categories were created. States receive mandatory or guaranteed funds of \$305 million, and Congress may also approve an additional \$200 million annually. Since that change was made, the program has never been fully funded. Funding for this program grew from \$60 million in FY 1994, to \$403.5 million in FY 2005.

The Deficit Reduction Omnibus Reconciliation Act of 2005, passed in February 2006, provides a one year (FY 2006) increase in mandatory, or guaranteed, funding for PSSF, bringing the mandatory funding up to \$345 million from the current level of \$305 million.

In addition to the mandatory funds guaranteed for PSSF annually, Congress also has the ability to approve up to \$200 million each year in additional discretionary funds. In FY 2006, Congress approved \$89.1 million in discretionary PSSF funds, a decrease of nearly \$9 million from the FY 2005 level—far short of the \$200 million that Congress could have approved. Therefore, the *net increase* for PSSF funding in FY 2006 will be slightly less than \$30 million, bringing total funding (mandatory and discretionary) for the program from \$403 million in FY 2005 to \$434 million in FY 2006.

The bill also amends the current Court Improvement Project (currently funded as a set-aside of regular PSSF funds), which provides grants to state's highest courts to use to assess and improve their child welfare proceedings. The bill provides additional funding for two new grant programs—each funded at \$10 million annually—aimed at strengthening the performance of courts on behalf of children who have been abused and neglected, including those in foster care and those waiting to be adopted.

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One grant's focus is aimed at improving courts' timely and complete action on behalf of children in foster care through improved data collection and better coordination between the courts and the state child welfare system. The other grant is to provide training to judges, attorneys, and other legal personnel in child welfare proceedings. In applying for the new grants, courts must demonstrate effective collaboration between the courts, the state child welfare agency, and Indian tribes. These new grants had been proposed in pending legislation (S.1679/H.R. 3756).

Support for PSSF from the White House Executive Branch has waned since FY 2002. President Bush highlighted an increase in funding for this program during his 2000 campaign and requested full funding in every budget submitted to Congress from 2000-2004, but his 2005 budget did not recommend full funding. For FY 2006, the President recommended only a slight increase of \$7 million for the program, instead of the \$101.5 million increase Congress could approve.

Use of Funds

PSSF can be used to provide family preservation services designed to help children and families in crisis, as well as extended and adoptive families. Services include programs to help reunite children with their birth families, if appropriate, or to place children in adoptive settings or another permanent arrangement; programs to prevent placement in foster care, including intensive family services; programs to provide follow-up services to families after a child has been returned from foster care; and services to improve parenting skills.

Funds can also be used for family support services that include a broad spectrum of community-based activities promoting the safety and well-being of children and families. Intended to help families not yet in crisis, these services include structured activities involving parents and children, respite care services for parents and caregivers, parenting skills training, and information and referral services. Programs may also include services outside the traditional scope of child welfare, such as health care, education, and employment.

PSSF funds are also used to provide time-limited reunification services to address the needs of children and families who are involved in the foster care system. Services are provided within 15 months after the child enters foster care. Reunification services for the child and family include counseling, substance abuse treatment, mental health services, assistance to address domestic violence issues, temporary child care, and transportation services.

Funds are allocated to states according to the relative shares of children receiving food stamps, subject to a 25% non-federal match. From annual mandatory funds, \$6 million is provided for research, evaluation, and technical assistance to identify and expand on programs proven effective. The State Court

Improvement Program receives an initial allocation of \$10 million annually, with additional funds provided if Congress allocates funds in addition to the \$305 million in mandatory funds. The law emphasizes the importance of using court improvements to promote ASEFA's goals of safety, permanence, and well-being. One percent of total mandatory funding is reserved for tribal governments.

In addition to this reserved funding, if Congress opts to provide additional discretionary funds, 3.3% of discretionary funding is dedicated to research, training, and evaluation; another 3.3% of discretionary funds are available for state court improvement programs; and 2% of discretionary funds are reserved for tribal governments.

Since 1997, adoption services are also provided with these funds. Aimed at increasing adoption of children in foster care, these services can be used to help children and families prepare for adoption and address their post-adoption needs.

KEY FACTS

- In 2003, an estimated 2.9 million cases of child abuse and neglect were reported and referred for investigation to state and local child protective service agencies because family members, professionals, or other citizens were concerned about their safety and well-being. After follow-up assessments, officials were able to substantiate 906,000 of these cases.
- Of the children determined to be abused or neglected, 57.1% received follow-up services; of the children who were reported abused or neglected but their cases were not substantiated, 25.1% received follow-up services.
- Of the 523,085 children in foster care in 2003, 246,650 had a goal of being reunified with their parent or principle caregiver; 151,770 exited foster care and were reunited with their parent or caregiver.
- Of the 523,085 children in foster care in 2003, 124,665 were waiting to be adopted. The number of children adopted from foster care has increased in recent years: 28,000 in 1996; 31,000 in 1997; 37,000 in 1998; 46,000 in 1999; 51,000 in 2000; 50,000 in 2001; and 52,000 in 2002. In 2003, adoptions decreased 3.8%, with 50,000 children adopted.

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

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