

2019 LEGISLATIVE AGENDA

Advancing Excellence in Practice & Policy:

Meeting the Challenge of the **Family First** Prevention Services Act



Recommendations for the Administration and 116th Congress

★ F I R S T S E S S I O N ★

Prevent Child Abuse: Reauthorize and Fund the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act and Fund the Community-Based Grants for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect

Significant additional resources are necessary for the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA). In 2017, there were more than 4 million child abuse referrals, involving over 7 million children, resulting in child protective services responses in 2.4 million cases. According to the Centers on Disease Prevention and Control (CDC), child abuse and neglect has a total lifetime economic cost of more than \$124 billion each year. It affects over 1 million children each year, with child abuse and neglect costing our nation \$220 million every day through increased investigations, foster care, health care costs, and behavioral health costs and treatment.

A study by Prevent Child Abuse America found that we paid \$80 billion to address child abuse and neglect in 2012. We need to prevent child abuse before it happens. **Congress must reauthorize the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA), then provide \$500 million in state CAPTA grants and \$500 million for the Community-Based Grants for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect/**

CBCAP. Healthy families are the key to prevention and resilient children. Prevention should be community-based; child and family safety are not just the child welfare system's responsibility. Prevention and treatment efforts must help families heal from trauma. Research and data are central to a public health approach, and significant additional resources are necessary for CAPTA/ CBCAP to be effective.

Sponsor and Pass the Brown-Stabenow Legislation

Congress passed the Family First Prevention Services Act (PL 115-123) in 2018. Now we must take the next step. The comprehensive legislation led by Senators Brown and Stabenow is that next step! This legislation will de-link family foster care

from the obsolete 1996 AFDC eligibility link or "look-back"; will strengthen support for relative caregivers by providing additional funding for crisis support services and expand family-finding and navigator programs; will increase state funding to support the child welfare workforce; will, for the first time, provide states with their own state-directed research funds to expand well-supported, supported and promising programs; will provide new funding for family foster care recruitment especially for special needs populations including sibling groups and youth populations and it will expand training including therapeutic care; and will allow states funding flexibility to transition to the Family First Act. **This is the NEXT STEP in reforming the child welfare system and in helping families and children!**



Congress Must Commit to Cut Child Poverty in Half in the Next Ten Years

The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NAS) recently released *A Roadmap to Reducing Child Poverty*, a study on reducing child poverty in the United States. The Congressionally commissioned report required a study that was bipartisan and evidence-based. The committee (including CWLA President & CEO Christine James-Brown) was made up of experts in economics, public policy, child psychology, and human development, and offered specific proposals to reduce child poverty by half over the next ten years.

The study determined that child poverty rates would be higher if not for current programs that provide income, food, housing, and medical care. It also indicated that a 50% reduction in ten years was demonstrated as achievable but will take a combination of work-oriented and income-support programs and policies. The study also identified a number of factors like health and well-being, positive neighborhood environments, and equitable treatment across racial and ethnic groups that impact and influence the success of anti-poverty programs and policies.

Children continue to disproportionately experience poverty in the United States and are 62% more likely to experience poverty than adults. There is no long-term national

strategy to address child poverty and the negative outcomes associated with it. The NAS study included analysis of the economic, health, and social costs of child poverty, as well as the effectiveness of current anti-poverty programs—including international, federal, state, and local efforts—to reduce child poverty. This report offers Congress several options. **Congress must commit to a national strategy to cut child poverty in half in ten years!**

Oppose Discrimination in the Placement of Children and Recruitment of Parents

Across the country, there are too many children in foster care who lack a stable, loving family to care for and nurture them. Finding a suitable foster or adoptive home can be a challenge, particularly for older children and those with special needs. Child welfare agencies must make decisions on the recruitment of parents and the placement of children based on what is in the best interest of the child. That may be more challenging in an ever-more-diverse society, but it remains just as important as ever.

Unfortunately, in recent years the debate has focused less on the needs and best interests of children and more on the political polarization of our current time. This means that many children will be deprived of the family that is best suited to meet their needs. A child could be denied a placement with a relative, a sibling group could be split apart, or a young person who identifies as LGBTQ could be denied an appropriate, supportive family.

Placement decisions must be based on the best interests of the child and, to ensure the broadest pool of families for children, foster, kin, and adoptive applicants should be assessed on the basis of their abilities to successfully parent a child needing family membership—not on their race, ethnicity, culture, income, age, marital status, religion, appearance, lifestyle, sexual orientation, or gender identity. Each prospective parent engaging with the state should be evaluated on their ability to safely, lovingly care for children, and each child must be placed based on what is in their best interest, as stated in the law. **Congress must oppose any legislation that allows discrimination in recruitment of foster and adoptive parents, and must protect and respect the needs of youth in foster care.**

Support the Child Care for Working Families Act

Research makes clear the critical importance of a child's development during the first years of life. As a result, child care and

early childhood education are critical to the future well-being of all children.

Congress created the Child Care and Development Block Grant Act (CCDBG) in 1990 and updated it with the Child Care and Development Block Grant Act of 2014. Now it is time to fully fund this important child and family services support. We thank the Congress for last year's significant increase of \$2.3 billion in funding for FY 2019. As a result, states have begun to reduce some waiting lists, improve on some quality goals, and expand eligibility—but that is just a start. The Child Care for Working Families Act (HR 1364 and S 586) and its passage will take us the rest of the way. The Act will provide for cost-sharing between the federal government and states to provide high-quality, affordable child care from birth through age 13, will more than double the number of children eligible for child care assistance, and will ensure that all those who are eligible can enroll their child in a quality program. **Congress needs to pass the Child Care for Working Families Act.**

Protect Families, Dreamers, and Children at the Border & in The United States

This past year has shown us unending stories about families separated at the border. Reports indicate that some children are lost in the system and may not be reunited with their parents. Still others are being placed far away from their families. When children are separated from parents, they face short- and long-term psychological damage, including depression, post-traumatic stress, anxiety, feelings of abandonment, and suicidal thoughts. Being separated from their family members and communities, cultural familiarities, schools, and other connections can cause children to struggle with their identity and face an undue sense of isolation, adding further stress to an already traumatic situation. **We call on Congress to enact fair immigration reform, to suspend mass deportations, and to oppose policies that seek to deter immigration by taking children from their parents.** In past Congresses, there have been several bipartisan "Dreamers Acts," including legislation in the 116th Congress. This legislation grants DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) beneficiaries permanent resident status on a conditional basis. Conditions include rigorous requirements, including meeting educational requirements, undergoing background checks, and determining a route to citizenship as valued members of our community, country, and future workforce. **Congress needs to protect immigrants who are DACA-status and prevent the separation of children from their families by passing the DREAM Act and related immigration reform legislation.**

Stable Housing for Families in Child Welfare

Access to stable housing is a critical tool to ensure that children and families remain intact. The CWLA *National Blueprint for Excellence in Child Welfare* articulates that communities should collaborate to ensure that families have access to and eligibility for supports and services that address basic needs, including housing.

Housing instability and homelessness among children and families is a significant issue, with an estimated 180,413 people in families—or 56,342 family households—identified as homeless. Housing and homelessness is a public health issue that impacts families involved in child welfare: Of the 269,690 children who entered foster care in 2017, 10% (27,929) were removed due to inadequate housing. What is needed is cross-system coordination and implementation between the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS); more evidence-based housing models, in particular supportive housing; program guidance from HHS in implementation of the Family First Prevention Services Act to expand access of services for families post-reunification; and new Family Unification Program (FUP) vouchers for children, youth, and families from the foster care system.

Health Care is Child Welfare: Protect the Affordable Care Act (ACA) and Medicaid

Congress must protect the ACA and oppose all block grants of Medicaid. Efforts to cut health insurance coverage will hurt efforts to reduce child abuse and foster care placements. Health care is a significant factor in whether families become and remain involved with child welfare. Children in foster care are at higher risk for physical and mental health issues, stemming from the maltreatment that led to their placement or from pre-existing health conditions and unmet health care needs.

The ACA, Medicaid, and the mental health parity laws have increased access to substance use and mental health services.

A 2018 analysis by the HHS indicates that a 10% increase in opioid overdose death rates correlates with a 4.4% increase in the foster care entry rate, and that a 10% increase in the hospitalization rate due to drug use correlates with a 3.3% increase in the foster care entry rate. In 2017, 442,000 children were in foster care, a significant increase since 2012. Congress needs to oppose any efforts to restrict the ACA any effort—through legislation, administrative rules, or waivers—that creates a Medicaid per capita cap or other forms of Medicaid block grants.

Reject Block Grants of Child Welfare and Other Vital Human Services

It is argued that block grants are about innovation and state flexibility. We believe block grants are not about results, but about cutting federal spending on children and families. The new NAS report *A Roadmap to Reducing Child Poverty*, in examining block grants, concluded: “Block grants that are adequately funded and sustained over time, and that provide for countercyclical relief, may serve local populations well by providing more fiscal flexibility for state and local governments. However, block grants that are inadequately funded, fail to be sustained, or lack provisions for countercyclical adjustment have resulted in reduced support for low-income families and in increased poverty. In addition, most block grants require only limited reporting and almost no evaluation, which decreases the likelihood that their funds will be used for their intended purposes.”

We know how this turns out because of the history of the Social Services Block Grant (SSBG), which was converted from an entitlement to a block grant in 1981; the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grant, which was converted from an entitlement in 1996; and because of an attempted effort to turn all child welfare and child protection into a child welfare block grant in 1995. All have or would have lost funding, mission, and the ability to analyze the outcomes for families and children served.

These are the Child Welfare League of America priorities for the 116th Congress.



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