



U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Ways and Means
Subcommittee on Work & Welfare
*Written Comments for Hearing, “Modernizing Child Welfare to Protect
Vulnerable Children”*

Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Neal, Subcommittee Chairman LaHood, Subcommittee Ranking Member Davis, and Members of the House Committee on Ways and Means, thank you for the opportunity to submit this statement for the record.

The Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) is a coalition of hundreds of private and public agencies that since 1920 has worked to serve children and families who are vulnerable. Our expertise, leadership and innovation on policies, programs, and practices help improve the lives of millions of children across the country. Our impact is felt worldwide.

We are grateful to the Chairman and Ranking Member for holding this important hearing and we appreciate the opportunity to submit our recommendations for the reauthorization of Title IV-B of the Social Security Act. CWLA acknowledges and applauds the long history of bipartisan leadership on child welfare issues. During the hearing, we heard many important themes and good ideas with which we agree, which we will highlight below. We also seek to caution against losing the progress that has been hard-won over decades of tireless advocacy for children, families, and communities.

Title IV-B Background and History

There are two child welfare programs created under Title IV-B of the Social Security Act: Title IV-B part 1 the Stephanie Tubbs Jones Child Welfare Services (CWS) program and Title IV-B part 2, the Marylee Allen Promoting Safe and Stable Families (PSSF) program. CWS provides much-needed flexible child welfare funding that assists state child protection systems and supports families through wraparound services. PSSF targets funding to help four categories of families: families who adopt, families who are reunifying, families avoiding foster care through preservation services, and family support to help many families who are vulnerable.

Title IV-B Part 1, Child Welfare Services (CWS) of the Social Security Act, was first established as part of the 1935 Social Security law. It evolved from a small source of federal funding for a range of children’s services from the 1930s through the late 1950s. Although Congress can appropriate up to \$325 million, the program funding peaked at \$295 million in 1994 with current funding now down to \$269 million.

Title IV-B part 2, Promoting Safe and Stable Families, started in 1993 as Family Preservation and Family Support and was created to promote family preservation programs that prevent foster care placements through intensive focused and limited efforts to help families at a crisis stage. The Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) in 1997 revamped the program to become the Promoting Safe and Stable Families (PSSF) block grant. Regulations require states to allocate at least 20% to each of the four service categories: family preservation, family support, reunification, and adoption support. CWLA has continued to advocate for this specificity because while the services could be the same, the four types of families served are different.

PSSF includes mandatory funding at \$345 million with \$20 million designated for Regional Partnership Grants to address substance use, \$20 million to promote the child welfare workforce and monthly caseworker visits and \$20 million to promote court training. Additionally, Congress can appropriate \$200 million more for the four services. Appropriations peaked at \$100 million in FY 2002 and are now down to \$69 million. Between mandatory and discretionary funding, the services reached their peak in 2004 at \$405 million. It is down to approximately \$360 million today. The Tribes receive 3% of the mandatory funds and 3% of the appropriated funds.

The Importance of Title IV-B

Title IV-B is a small portion of federal funding for child welfare, but it is an important piece of the puzzle. It provides flexible funding to states to target root causes of maltreatment and to provide families with connections to other systems for support. The very limited funding for prevention services stands in contrast to the far greater federal investment in paying for the costs of foster care, covered by Title IV-E, despite widespread recognition of the need to invest in upstream prevention. The Family First Prevention Services Act provides additional funding for evidence-based services to prevent families from entering foster care, while the flexibility of Title IV-B funds can complement the more rigorous requirements of Family First and help develop evidence-based models.

According to the annual Child Maltreatment Report, for fiscal year 2021, there are nationally an estimated 600,000 victims of child abuse and neglect. Child Protective Services (CPS) agencies received a national estimate of just under 4 million (3,987,000) total referrals, including approximately 7.18 million children. Forty-six states reported that an estimated 1,761,128 children received prevention services, and the biggest source of federal funding for these services was the IV-B Promoting Safe and Stable Families program. However, a large portion of children and families reported to CPS for suspected child maltreatment do not receive post-response services, and increased funding for Title IV-B would give states the ability to support additional children and families.

Key Focuses for Title IV-B Reauthorization

Increased Investment. As noted above, Title IV-B funding has declined over the years. Child Welfare Services funding peaked at \$295 million in 1994 with current funding now down to

\$269 million. Between mandatory and discretionary funding for PSSF, the services reached their peak in 2004 at \$405 million. It is down to approximately \$360 million today. Title IV-B has never been fully funded at the levels authorized, never mind the levels needed to truly transform the child welfare system.

Increased funding in Title IV-B would allow states to not only help address the crises they are facing, such as workforce concerns, a shortage of resource families, and the need for concrete supports and services, but also proactively work to improve core child welfare services such as family preservation, prevention, kin finding, and others. Programs and funding that focus on preventing child abuse and neglect before it happens and keeping children safely in their homes help to reduce the number of children entering the child welfare system, thereby reducing trauma and stress for families as well as reducing state and federal spending on costly out of home care and mental and behavioral health services for children and caregivers down the road. Congress has rightly shifted to supporting upstream prevention by allowing Title IV-E funding to be spent on evidence-based solutions through the Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA). However, some families need concrete and economic support, not evidence-based programs, to keep their children safely in the home. Additionally, these flexible funds could be used to help in the development of future evidenced-based approaches that will strengthen implementation and effectiveness of FFPSA. The Subcommittee should increase the availability of flexible funding for child welfare agencies to address primary prevention and family preservation to reduce child welfare involvement through increased Title IV-B funding.

Support the Child Welfare Workforce. A major theme that emerged from the witness testimony and Member questions was the need to better support the child welfare workforce.

Transformation and reform in the child welfare system moves at the speed of the workforce. A well-trained and well-staffed child welfare workforce is vital to the goals of legislators and the broader advocacy community. All the reforms enacted by Congress in recent years, including screening victims of sex trafficking, reducing group home care, expanding kinship care, finding more foster parents, enhanced foster parent training, increasing adoptions, more direct consulting with youth in foster care, addressing substance abuse and mental health needs within the families, and entering new data are all dependent on the caseworker.

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, the child welfare workforce faced serious concerns. The labor-intensive and emotional nature of child welfare work leads to high levels of turnover. Now, the pandemic has worsened pre-existing issues within the workforce, with high turnover rates and rising concern over compassion fatigue, burnout, and secondary trauma. Increased turnover rates and the resulting higher caseloads perpetuate the caseworker crisis.

High turnover rates negatively impact children and families. According to the New York City-based organization Fostering Change for Children, up to 40 percent of child welfare caseworkers leave their jobs every year. Their data shows, “[c]hildren with one caseworker achieve permanency in 74.5 percent of cases. But the more caseworkers involved in a child’s life, the less chance a child has to achieve permanency, ranging from 17.5% for children with two

caseworkers, to the low rate of 0.1% for children who had six or seven caseworkers during their time in care.¹”

Strengthening the workforce and ensuring caseworkers have manageable workloads will achieve a reduction in child abuse, reduce the number of children going into foster care, and increase adoptions for children of all ages. Title IV-B reauthorization offers an opportunity to address the workforce crisis. CWLA recommends the following investments and policy changes:

1. Increase funding for workforce development and training. There is currently \$20M designated for workforce development in Title IV-B, dependent upon caseworkers visiting families on a monthly basis. Once split among all the state, county, and tribal child welfare programs, this \$20M does not go nearly far enough to truly support the workforce. We recommend the Subcommittee substantially increase this set aside.
2. Promote recruitment and retention. Recruitment and retention of qualified caseworkers is essential for establishing a well-staffed and well-trained workforce. High vacancy rates and unfilled positions lead to much higher caseloads for the frontlines staff, and the stress from high caseloads leads to high rates of turnover and burnout; these problems compound on one another. There are several promising practices that are helping agencies address these key issues, and Congress should support states and counties in implementing and evaluating the effectiveness of these practices. Congress should create new competitive or formula grants in Title IV-B of the Social Security Act with additional funding for states to address both recruitment and retention.
3. Increase overall child welfare funding. One of the key issues in both recruiting and retaining qualified caseworkers is low wages. Child welfare staff consistently point out that in many states and localities, entry-level child welfare positions pay no better than the local Target or Starbucks, even though the work is much more challenging. According to the National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-Being II baseline report, 75% of caseworkers earned an annual salary between \$30,000 and \$49,999. Better compensation and benefits for staff would go a long way in addressing vacancies and turnover rates, but adequate funding for child welfare agencies is necessary to accomplish this goal, as funding has not kept pace with the rising cost of living and inflation. In addition to delinking Title IV-E foster care eligibility from the 1996 AFDC standards, the Subcommittee should increase both mandatory and discretionary funding in Title IV-B programs.
4. Create taskforces to compile and disseminate best practices. States, counties, and not-for-profit agencies have been long engaged in the difficult work of addressing the workforce crisis, and many best and promising practices have emerged through their efforts. However, there are concerns that continue to plague agencies across the nation. Congress should create taskforces or working groups to compile and disseminate best practices on these nationwide issues, such as creating psychological safety and wellness for staff,

¹ Fostering Change for Children (2020). *Frontline Workers: Turnover*. New York City, Taken from the web: <http://fosteringchangeforchildren.org/#>.

racial disparities in child welfare and promoting a diverse workforce, and reducing barriers to social work licensure.

Focus Title IV-B on Families. There was much discussion about the various set-asides in Title IV-B during the hearing. Subcommittee members and witnesses rightly noted that Title IV-B houses several different programs and is layered and complex; we would note that child maltreatment is a complex issue, and the child welfare system has evolved into an intricate system of programs and services to address these complexities. Title IV-B programs are reflective of that evolution. The set-asides have been added over time to address the needs of families and communities that were not being served by Title IV-E foster care payments and were not being addressed by states through the Child Welfare Services block grant. PSSF was added to the original Child Welfare Services to focus funding on family support (broad prevention services from which everyone in the community benefits) and family preservation (more targeted to children and families that are vulnerable to child welfare involvement). These continue to be critical funds for child welfare agencies to prevent entry into foster care and the trauma that comes with child welfare involvement, as was explained so well by Ms. Cherie Craft of Smart from the Start and Ms. Katherine Marquart of FosterAdopt Connect in their testimonies. Director Tracey Gruber of the Utah Department of Health and Human Services also started her testimony with a story highlighting the successful use of Title IV-B funds for preservation.

As noted above, the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA, PL 105-89, 1997) amended PSSF to include adoption support and time-limited reunification services in addition to family support and preservation. This addition recognizes the need to prevent re-entry into foster care – adoptive and reunified families need preservation services, too. A key outcome for child welfare is that children achieve permanency, but we know that a portion of reunifications and adoptions fail, retraumatizing children and thrusting them back into the foster care system. According to data published by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, "among children who were discharged from their first foster care placement and reunited with their caregivers, 27% returned to foster care."² Research indicates that approximately 5 to 20 percent of children who exit foster care to adoption or guardianship experience discontinuity.³ These adoption and reunification funds are essential to family stability for those children that are exiting foster care into permanency, especially in light of the fact that there are no services for these populations that have been approved for the Family First Clearinghouse at this time. More investment in these vital services would allow for the development and evaluation of programs that could eventually be reimbursable by Title IV-E FFPSA funds.

Additionally, there are several other set-aside programs that make Title IV-B work for the families involved in the child welfare system. The Court Improvement Program, which Ms. Prudence Beidler Carr covered masterfully in her testimony and responses to questions, is the only federal funding source specifically for child welfare and court collaboration, improving the

² Annie E. Casey Foundation, Center for State Child Welfare Data. "Reentry to Foster Care." 2020. Retrieved from <https://www.aecf.org/resources/reentry-to-foster-care>

³³ Children's Bureau. "Discontinuity and Disruption in Adoptions and Guardianships." 2021. Retrieved from https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/s_discon.pdf

legal processes of the child welfare system and better serving families. The Regional Partnership Grants (RPGs) offer critical support in addressing substance use for families involved in child welfare or at risk of child welfare involvement. The Kinship Navigator funding supports kinship caregivers in accessing services and benefits, providing vital supports and allowing children to be cared for by their family. Each of these programs is technically a set aside, and each one ensures that states and counties are addressing the needs of children and families. CWLA recommends that the Subcommittee expand these programs in Title IV-B reauthorization.

Increasing access for Tribal programs. CWLA is grateful for the Subcommittee's commitment to reducing barriers to funding for Native American and Alaska Native child welfare programs, and we recognize Subcommittee Members' support for two important bills that would amend Title IV-B for this purpose: *The Strengthening Tribal Families Act* and the *Tribal Families Fairness Act*. We agree with the assessment of Dr. Sanders of Casey Family Programs that increasing funding for Tribal child welfare programs, in addition to reducing barriers through policy change, is one of the key investments that the Subcommittee should its efforts for this reauthorization of Title IV-B, and we encourage the inclusion of these two bills along with an increase in funds.

Maintain mandatory funding. One witness, Director Gruber of Utah, highlighted that states and counties face obstacles in administering Title IV-B funds due to the complexity and requirements of the various funding streams. Although CWLA is not opposed to considering ways to reduce barriers and overlap between the two subparts and the various additional programs, we caution the committee against structural changes that will result in losing the progress that has been hard-won over decades of tireless advocacy for children, families, and communities. The set asides and programs have been added over the years to address gaps in federal funding and have been used to creatively and innovatively meet the unique needs of children and families. As noted above, although the services across the four categories in PSSF may look identical to one another, the families that are served are very different and distinct. CWLA advocates for maintaining this specificity to continue to serve these specific children and families.

Should structural changes to Title IV-B be considered, CWLA strongly urges the Subcommittee to maintain the mandatory funding in Title IV-B. Title IV-B is currently a mix of mandatory and discretionary funding, making conversations about streamlining or collapsing the two subparts far more complicated. Should the Subcommittee move to turn Title IV-B into a discretionary block grant, as has happened to other federal programs, this vital source of child welfare funding would be much more vulnerable to cuts in future budget cycles with difficult topline agreements. As noted throughout these comments, additional funding is needed for child welfare services, and giving up the mandatory funding in Title IV-B would move our system in the opposite direction from where we need to be.

Conclusion

We wish to again thank Chairman LaHood and Ranking Member Davis for hosting this hearing, for convening an excellent panel of expert witnesses, and for their attention to and support of the children and families involved with the child welfare system. This hearing was an energizing

first step toward reauthorizing this important program, and we stand ready and eager to work with the Subcommittee in ensuring that federal child welfare funding best supports our agencies and communities as they work tirelessly to prevent and address child maltreatment.