



**U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Ways and Means**  
*Written Comments for Hearing, “Strengthening Child Welfare and Protecting  
America’s Children”*  
June 26, 2024

Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Neal, 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 wish to offer our recommendations and priorities for Title IV-B Reauthorization.

CWLA has previously submitted comments on the two Title IV-B hearings held by the Subcommittee on Work and Welfare, “[Modernizing Child Welfare to Protect Vulnerable Children](#),” in September 2023, and “[Pathways to Independence: Supporting Youth Aging Out of Foster Care](#),” in January 2024, and for the Stakeholders Roundtable in December 2023. We continue to be thankful for the Committee’s attention to this important child welfare program this Congress.

**The Importance of Title IV-B**

Title IV-B is a small but important portion of federal funding for child welfare. It provides flexible funding to states to target root causes of maltreatment, provide services and resources to stabilize families, and 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.

### **Key Focuses for Title IV-B Reauthorization**

Reauthorization of Title IV-B offers an opportunity to make meaningful changes to child welfare law that can provide additional investment in services for children and families, increased support for Tribal child welfare programs, and support for the child welfare workforce.

**Increased Investment.** 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 our child welfare systems. As Representative Sanchez demonstrated during her questions, all of the hearing witnesses support increasing the funding for Title IV-B.

The reality is that the mission and purpose of Title IV-B cannot be accomplished with the current funding levels of the program. If congress had maintained these two block grants adjusted for inflation at their peak levels:<sup>1</sup>

- The 1994 peak funding for Child Welfare Services/Stephanie Tubbs Jones total of \$294 million would be at **\$602 million (instead of \$269 million)**
- The peak 2003 funding for Promoting Safe and Stable Families (PSSF) in 2003 total \$405 million (for the core non-set asides) would be **\$666 million (instead of \$360 million)**
- A total of **\$1.268 billion for the two IV-B programs**

Increased funding in Title IV-B would allow states to better address the crises they are facing, such as workforce concerns, a shortage of resource families, and the need for concrete supports and services, and to 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 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 and 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 committed to supporting upstream interventions 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 – increased investment in CWS and PSSF would allow states to provide more of these supports to families. The Committee should increase the

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<sup>1</sup> Inflation Calculator. Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis. <https://www.minneapolisfed.org/about-us/monetary-policy/inflation-calculator>

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.

Increased funding could be used to develop evidence-based approaches that will strengthen implementation and effectiveness of FFPSA. CWLA has endorsed Representatives Feenstra and Kildee's proposal, H.R. 8814, the *Strengthening Evidence-based Prevention Services Act*, to provide additional funding for such research. Too often, needed research at both the federal and state level is pushed aside for other priorities; this bill will help states and agencies to prioritize this research. We believe this proposal is a first step in the direction of a full and robust array of services available in the Title IV-E Prevention Services Clearinghouse, and we encourage the Committee to include this bill in any reauthorization text that moves forward.

***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; Mr. Geen in particular drew attention to workforce concerns multiple times during the hearing, noting the need for better recruitment and retention of qualified caseworkers.

All the reforms enacted by Congress in recent years and any new improvements included in a Title IV-B reauthorization are dependent upon the individual caseworker serving children and families. Supporting the workforce is a key component of achieving better outcomes for children: a Government Accountability Office (GAO) analysis of 27 available Child and Family Services Reviews (CFSRs) in 2003 showed that staff shortages, high caseloads, and worker turnover were factors impeding progress toward the achievement of federal safety and permanency outcomes.<sup>2</sup> The report noted that staffing shortages and high caseloads disrupt case management by limiting their ability to establish and maintain relationships with children and families. Research in Milwaukee and Illinois suggests that children are more likely to achieve permanence if they are assigned fewer workers over the course of their stay in foster care.<sup>3</sup> In past hearings, your members have heard testimony from youth formerly in foster care (lived experience) who have recounted instances whereby their lives and trajectory have been helped by a key caseworker with whom they had an ongoing relationship.

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 and permanency for children of all ages. Title IV-B reauthorization offers an opportunity to address the workforce crisis. CWLA endorses Representative Smucker's bill, HR 8745, the *Child Welfare Workforce Development Act*, that would update the Monthly Caseworker Visits program by removing penalties and refocusing the funds on workforce recruitment, training and retention, one of the original goals of this provision when this Committee included it in 2006. This proposal is a good first step in addressing child welfare workforce concerns.

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<sup>2</sup> HHS Could Play a Greater Role in Helping Child Welfare Agencies Recruit and Retain Staff. Government Accountability Office. March 2003. Retrieved from <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-03-357.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> The Impact of Turnover on Families Involved in Child Welfare. National Child Welfare Workforce Institute. 2023. Retrieved from <https://ncwwi.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/The-Impact-of-Turnover-on-Families-Involved-in-Child-Welfare.pdf>

CWLA also recommends<sup>4</sup> the following investments and policy changes:

1. Increase funding for workforce development and training. There is currently \$20M designated for the Monthly Caseworker Visit Program. Increase this set aside to \$60M.
2. Promote recruitment and retention. There are several promising practices that are helping agencies address these key issues, and Congress should create new competitive or formula grants in Title IV-B with additional funding for states to address both recruitment and retention.
3. Increase funding for prevention and family preservation. 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. Congress should increase the availability of funding in PSSF to reduce caseloads for workers by keeping families together.
4. Compile and disseminate best practices. Congress should create taskforces or direct existing entities to compile and disseminate best practices on nationwide issues, such as creating psychological safety and wellness for staff, racial disparities in child welfare and promoting a diverse workforce and reducing barriers to social work licensure.

***Increasing access for Tribal programs.*** CWLA is grateful for the Committee’s commitment to reducing barriers to funding for Native American and Alaska Native child welfare programs and we appreciated the field hearing, “Empowering Native American and Rural Communities,” which focused on this topic. The requirements of Title IV-B often make the funding inaccessible to Tribal child welfare programs, particularly those in smaller, less-resourced tribes, and the amount of funding available is too small to justify the effort needed to secure it. CWLA has endorsed H.R. 8621, *The Strengthening Tribal Families Act*, from Representatives Bacon and Chu and we encourage the Committee to prioritize the inclusion of this bill in Title IV-B Reauthorization negotiations. CWLA is also supportive of increasing the tribal set-aside in PSSF.

### **Recommendations Beyond Title IV-B**

Throughout the hearing, there were many important comments and recommendations that fell outside the scope of the Title IV-B program, but within the jurisdiction of the Committee.

***Addressing Poverty for Families with Child Welfare Involvement.*** CWLA applauds Chairman Smith and Representative Gwen Moore for raising the need to address poverty for families involved in, or at risk of involvement with, the child welfare system. Reducing, and eventually eliminating, child poverty is a critical step in achieving important child welfare policy goals like preventing child abuse and neglect, prioritizing and increasing family preservation, and reducing the need for foster care. Too often, poverty and the lack of economic support that exists in

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<sup>4</sup> Transform Child Welfare through Support for the Workforce. Child Welfare League of America. Retrieved from: [https://www.cwla.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/CWLA\\_PolicyBrief\\_WorkforceR3.pdf](https://www.cwla.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/CWLA_PolicyBrief_WorkforceR3.pdf)

impoverished communities contribute to circumstances that may prompt involvement of children and families in the child welfare system.<sup>5</sup>

Title IV-B accounts for only 4% of child welfare funding nationally; even with a meaningful increase in funding, there is not enough money in this program to address the root causes of poverty in a significant way, nor could states lift families out of poverty through this program. PSSF funds can provide emergency stabilization funds for families, but there are other programs that can better address the issues faced by children in families with low incomes.

As the House tax writing committee, the Ways and Means Committee has the ability to amend the tax code to provide support for families to escape poverty. Chairman Smith's bill, the *Tax Relief for American Families and Workers Act*, has the potential to do much more to address the needs of families at risk of child welfare involvement by directly providing additional financial resources for families that need them; CWLA has endorsed and supported this bill. Furthermore, a fully refundable Child Tax Credit would provide relief for families with the lowest incomes and CTC monthly payments would provide steady support for such families, allowing them to meet basic needs on a consistent basis. Research from the Expanded Child Tax Credit has found that most families spent these monthly payments on meeting basic needs, such as food, essential bills, clothing, school supplies, housing and child care.<sup>6</sup>

The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program offers another opportunity to address child and family poverty; CWLA submitted comments for the record for the two TANF hearings this Congress, "[\*Welfare is Broken: Restoring Work Requirements to Lift Americans Out of Poverty\*](#)" and "[\*Where is all the Welfare Money Going? Reclaiming TANF Non-Assistance Dollars to Lift Americans Out of Poverty.\*](#)" TANF is important to child welfare for three reasons: its role in providing support to relative caregivers, its significant financial support to wrap-around child welfare services, and its potential to address child poverty, which research has shown is a risk factor in abuse and neglect.

As of 2019, States were spending approximately \$1.7 billion of their TANF funds on child welfare-related spending, including to address the concrete and economic needs of families; this spending is more than double the total funding of Title IV-B. The first purpose of TANF is to allow children to remain at home, making the program complimentary to Title IV-B's focus on family preservation. The TANF block grant has not been increased, and was actually reduced in 2012, despite rising inflation and cost of living eroding its value by 40 percent. An increase in the TANF block grant would provide additional support to caregivers with low incomes. Some of the proposals to modify Title IV-B funding could be better addressed by reauthorizing and expanding TANF, returning the program to one of its vital uses from 1996: allowing states to provide much-needed emergency services, supports and assistance. Additionally, as TANF funding has shrunk, it has not supported relative/kinship caregivers at the same levels as it did in the past.

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<sup>5</sup> Lift Children out of Poverty. Child Welfare League of America. April 2024. Retrieved from: [https://www.cwla.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/2024\\_PB\\_HT\\_ChildPoverty\\_e.pdf](https://www.cwla.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/2024_PB_HT_ChildPoverty_e.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Megan A. Curran. 2021. "Research Roundup of the Expanded Child Tax Credit: The First 6 Months." Poverty and Social Policy Report. Center on Poverty and Social Policy, Columbia University. Vol.5, no.5. [www.povertycenter.columbia.edu/publication/child-tax-credit/research-roundup](http://www.povertycenter.columbia.edu/publication/child-tax-credit/research-roundup)

CWLA supports the inclusion of poverty reduction as one of the core purposes of the act, as we did more than two decades ago. We feel this is an important step in helping to focus TANF on assistance for families who are poor. TANF reform is an opportunity to focus on reducing poverty for children, and re-focusing the mission of the TANF program on child poverty would provide critical relief to families both in and outside of the formal child welfare system and could reduce reports of suspected child maltreatment due to poverty-related neglect.

***Title IV-E Reform and Investment.*** Although the hearing was focused on Title IV-B reauthorization, many of the concerns raised could be better addressed in Title IV-E, the largest funding source for child welfare programs. Ms. Petersen, in her testimony, spoke to the lack of support for young people who transition from foster care to independence, and Mr. Geen acknowledged the need for additional funding and support for youth in care. The Chafee program offers these services for older youth, and additional funding for this program and the Education and Training Vouchers (ETVs) would help states to provide more support for these young people.

Additionally, CWLA has endorsed H.R. 7010, the *Increasing Access to Foster Care Through 21 Act*, introduced by Representatives Chu and Houchin, which would incentivize states to extend foster care through age 21, providing additional stability and support to young adults who choose to remain in care.

Chairman Smith and Work and Welfare Subcommittee Chairman LaHood have expressed a desire to modernize child welfare law to meet the current needs of families and communities through Title IV-B reauthorization. While there are certainly many updates that can and should be made in Title IV-B, some of which are listed above, it is impossible to talk about modernizing child welfare without acknowledging that Title IV-E eligibility is still tied to the 1996 Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) eligibility. We cannot claim that we are modernizing child welfare if we continue to accept an eligibility standard that is nearly 30 years old and excludes more than 60% of children in foster care;<sup>7</sup> the Committee must address this outdated framework. CWLA is eager to work with the Committee to identify alternative eligibility criteria to meet the needs of families and communities today.

***Residential Treatment.*** Although the hearing was not specifically about residential treatment, as Title IV-B does not typically fund residential care, we acknowledge and thank Ms. Hilton for her testimony about her experiences in residential facilities and her advocacy work on the topic. CWLA has endorsed the *Stop Institutional Child Abuse Act*.

CWLA submitted a [statement for the record](#) for the recent Senate Finance Committee hearing, “*Youth Residential Treatment Facilities: Examining Failures and Evaluating Solutions*,” drawing on CWLA’s Standards of Excellence in Residential Services and the CWLA National Blueprint for Excellence in Child Welfare. Many of CWLA’s recommendations fall outside the jurisdiction of the Ways and Means Committee, but Committee members and staff with expertise

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<sup>7</sup> Title IV-E Programs Expenditure and Caseload Data 2022. Department of Health and Human Services. Administration for Children and Families. Children’s Bureau. September 2023. Retrieved from: <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/report/programs-expenditure-caseload-data-2022>

in child welfare programs and services have an opportunity to inform and work with counterparts in other House Committees and across the Capitol to advance policies that raise the standard for residential treatment, provide more oversight and accountability for programs that are privately funded or owned by private equity firms, and support the full array of mental- and behavioral health services needed before, during and after residential treatment.

## **Conclusion**

We wish to again thank Chairman Smith and Ranking Member Neal for hosting this hearing and for their attention to and support of the children and families involved with the child welfare system. Reauthorization of Title IV-B offers an opportunity to improve our policies and funding to make a difference in the lives of children and families. CWLA stand ready and eager to work with the Committee in ensuring that federal child welfare funding best supports our agencies and communities as they work tirelessly to prevent and address child maltreatment.