



## CHILD WELFARE

*PPC Goal: Ensure each child in Pennsylvania has the opportunity to grow up in a home where they are safe and protected from abuse and neglect.*

For those children who are victims of trauma, the system should ensure that services are provided to heal and preserve the family, and if out-of-home care is necessary, that placement is in a family-based setting, preferably kin. Community-based interventions should be sought to prevent the need for unnecessary out-of-home removal, expedite reunification, and ensure permanency for every child and youth.

### POLICY PRIORITIES:

**1. Strengthen the response to child abuse and neglect by building a strong and robust community prevention model.**

- a. Analyze the outcomes of the 2013-2014 child protective services law, including child protective and general protective services to determine how to adequately address allegations of poverty and neglect.
- b. Advocate for investments in social safety net programs that better serve families prior to reaching crisis, such as housing, child care, education supports, and mental health.
- c. Research diversionary and community-based models that support primary prevention and serve families within their own communities to reduce the need for formal child welfare intervention.

## **2. Improve policies that increase the identification and utilization of kin resources.**

- a. Enhance kinship family recruitment, licensing, training, and retention policies to eliminate practices that discriminate against and arbitrarily disqualify kin from being approved as resources, including implementation of kin-specific licensing.
- b. Review licensing and training requirements for foster parents to ensure that they are equipped and adequately supported to raise children and youth with complex needs and significant trauma. Uplift the lived experiences of biological parents, kin, and children/youth who have been impacted by the child welfare system as a catalyst to identifying strategies that best support those being served.
- c. Make appropriate updates to the Kinship Care Act, Family Finding Act, and Juvenile Act. Additional data collection and accountability measures for counties are statutorily needed to increase greater family finding efforts and child placement with kin.

## **3. Reduce the use of group care unless it is necessary to meet the time-limited treatment needs of youth.**

- a. Expand data collection and analysis to better understand the characteristics of youth being placed in congregate care settings, including dependent and delinquent youth.
- b. Advocate for the increased use of evidence-based or research-informed discharge services to better support re-entry into the community and decrease the need for additional future out-of-home placements.
- c. Monitor the administration's work related to complex cases and research how the mental health, behavioral health, and substance use systems can support youth prior to the need for formal congregate care placement.

## **4. Improve outcomes for transition age youth in foster care or exiting to adulthood.**

- a. Identify strategies for building connections with supportive adults, promoting access to high-quality services, and elevating needs for effectively transitioning to adulthood.

- b. Enhance the delivery of services to older youth to ensure the promotion of health and healing, family connections, and economic security.
- c. Analyze educational data for foster youth to determine if impacts from educational stability policies are having intended results; further identify ways to promote career exploration and goal setting practices to consider technical and post-secondary education options.
- d. Utilize the recommendations received through youth community feedback sessions to set formal policy recommendations and identify how youth can be more integrated into advocacy efforts.

## **5. Ensure that biological parents, caregivers, children, and youth are receiving adequate mental and behavioral health services to avoid the need for formal child welfare intervention and foster care placement.**

- a. Conduct a landscape analysis of access to and utilization of mental health and behavioral health services at different points in the life of a case (i.e., investigation, dependency, etc.).
- b. Further analyze Pennsylvania's Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) and other placement data for children and youth being placed for mental or behavioral health instability to determine if services were provided to mitigate risk and further identify prevention approaches.

## **6. Monitor policy reform to ensure the child welfare system is adequately supported from both financial and staffing perspectives at the federal, state, and county levels.**

- a. Review, and when appropriate, provide feedback on the annual Needs Based Plan and Budget.
- b. Identify strategies to maintain a qualified, competent child welfare workforce.