



OHIO
CHILDREN'S
BUDGET
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ISSUE BRIEF

Issue: Family First Prevention Services Act

Ohio can harness new federal resources to prevent children from coming into foster care

Within months of the biennial budget taking effect, Ohio will implement a substantial federal law designed to support struggling families with evidence-based interventions so that children at risk of abuse or neglect can remain safely at home. If implemented with adequate resources and cross-system support, the Family First Prevention Services Act could help Ohio's child protection system reduce foster care, lessening the trauma of separating children from their families, and place more of those children who must come into county custody in family-based foster home settings instead of in institutions.

Policy

Starting Oct. 1, 2021, the federal government will begin matching up to half the costs Ohio spends on specific evidence-based mental health, substance abuse and parenting education services for families of children at risk of entering foster care. These programs can be provided for up to a year in the homes of any parent, kin caregiver or adoptive parent whose children might otherwise enter the temporary custody of a children services agency.

The Family First Act expands federal reimbursement to prevent foster care and limits reimbursement for congregate care

The Family First Act also eliminates federal reimbursement for foster youth placed in group homes or residential treatment centers that do not meet new quality standards. This means children will be placed instead in family foster homes, where research shows they have better outcomes. Other federal benefits, such as dollar-for-dollar match for the new Ohio Kinship and Adoption Navigator's services for grandparents and other kinship caregivers, will be available under Family First, too.

Challenge

Like other states, Ohio has a once-in-a-generation opportunity to make much-needed reforms to the way struggling families and children are served, but in order to maximize outcomes for Ohioans, several challenges must be overcome:

- Federal funds will pay for up to half the cost of prevention services, but there is currently no state funding source for paying the match, leaving the burden on counties
- Five evidence-based services have been selected for the first phase of implementation, including Ohio START [www.ohiostart.org], but resources are needed to ensure that such innovations are available to serve families no matter where they live across the state, not just in metro areas



- Capacity and service array must be developed for the other four services: Multi-Systemic Therapy, Functional Family Therapy, Parents As Teachers and Healthy Families America
- Both the public children services workforce and the private foster care and behavioral health provider workforce are insufficient to meet new demands, requiring a solution that will lead to new jobs and new social service infrastructure

Opportunity

Over the long term, the Family First Act is designed to reduce state and local costs by slowing the pace of children entering foster care – a trend that has been increasing markedly since 2013. Since then, the number of children in foster care on any given day has risen by 28%, from 12,000 to more than 16,000 kids. The cost of placing these children in foster family homes, group homes and residential treatment centers skyrocketed by \$100 million.

In-home evidence-based interventions can help reduce the number of children separated from their families and avoid costly placement expenses. And by preventing children from entering foster care in the first place, we eliminate the long-term damage of family separation and trauma that leads to debilitating outcomes for children as they grow into adults.

In the current environment, with a system reeling from an addiction epidemic and a global pandemic, funding is desperately needed to help Ohio embrace this opportunity. Time-limited assistance has been provided through a federal appropriation under the Family First Transition Act. Those funds are being used to expand capacity of the five evidence-based interventions selected by Ohio and to assist residential facilities in meeting new standards, including accreditation and clinical supports. Also, the Ohio Department of Medicaid's new OhioRISE managed care program will assist both in serving children who otherwise might go into county agency custody and also in supporting youth in foster care so that they can remain living in families instead of institutions. However, county children services agencies anticipate additional costs associated with offering evidence-based interventions and placing youth in newly qualified residential treatment programs. A cost analysis by the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services is in process.

Support Family First: Budget Recommendation

To meet this opportunity, Ohio must:

- Prioritize state resources for the ongoing match, development and evaluation of evidence-based interventions within public and private agencies, at least until a reversal in current foster care entry trends can be achieved, so that children in every Ohio county have the same opportunity to remain with their family rather than enter foster care, regardless of local resources
- Continue funding Ohio START at \$10 million per year (GRF) to address the needs of families involved in children services and struggling with addiction; over the next biennium, Ohio START will continue to expand to remaining counties as one of Ohio's selected Family First services
- Provide support for increasing placement costs as Ohio implements new residential placement requirements; placement costs can be expected to decline over time as Family First implementation matures, but costs may rise during the startup period (an actuarial study in process at ODJFS can guide the need for this investments)
- Provide ongoing training and technical assistance to public and private child-serving agencies to achieve successful implementation of Family First

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Additional Resources:

[Family First Act](#)

[Ohio Department of Job and Family Services](#)

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