



OHIO
CHILDREN'S
BUDGET
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ISSUE BRIEF

ISSUE: Children Services Stabilization and Transformation

Every child deserves to grow up in a safe, stable, and permanent family. In 2020, nearly 16,500 Ohio children¹ are living in foster care on any given day, up from 12,500 children in 2013. However, the total number of children in foster care over the course of a year is much higher. For example, in 2018, over 26,700 children were in foster care at some point. Being removed from home and entering foster care is a traumatic experience for children, with consequences that can last a lifetime. These children are among Ohio's most vulnerable and must be prioritized.

The growing number of children in foster care, the accompanying increase in placement costs, and the lack of appropriate services and placements in many parts of the state have put severe stress on children services agencies. Recognizing this crisis, Governor DeWine and the legislature made historic investments in child protection in the last state budget. Ohio must continue its commitment to children services stabilization and transformation, grounded in the vision at right.

Challenges

Protecting children from abuse and neglect and stabilizing families continue to be some of the most challenging jobs in social services. The challenges are even more pressing due to an addiction epidemic that has continued to grow, with May 2020 being the deadliest month for overdoses in 14 years. On top of that, the global pandemic requires Ohio's public children services agencies (PCSAs) to carry out their mission to protect children while juggling new guidelines for in-person visits, exposures, and quarantines, thus creating a high level of stress and uncertainty in a workforce that was already in a state of crisis.

While Ohio's child protection system is on a path to stabilization, placement difficulties continue because more children are entering foster care, children are staying in care longer, and children entering care have more complex needs—including youth whose needs are primarily related to mental health, addiction, developmental disability, and/or juvenile delinquency, rather than the result of abuse and neglect.

Children Services Vision

- Children should be raised in families, not in institutions.
- Services should start before children must be removed from their homes for abuse or neglect.
- Children who are removed should be placed with kin or as close to home as possible.
- Ohio must build a highly trained workforce with manageable caseloads to serve families.



Opportunities

Despite these pressing challenges, Ohio is at a pivotal time. The Family First Prevention Services Act² will be implemented by October 2021. Through dramatic funding changes, Family First puts the focus on prevention and recognizes that most families can provide safe and loving care when provided with needed services in such areas as mental health, substance abuse treatment, and parenting skills. When foster care is necessary, Family First requires that children be placed in the least restrictive, most family-like setting appropriate for their needs³. In cases where residential care remains the best option, Family First seeks to improve the oversight of that care, and to ensure that residential facilities provide quality, trauma-informed supports. Maximizing this transformative opportunity requires ongoing leadership, resources, and commitment at the state and local levels. More information be found in the [Family First Budget Brief](#).

Support Child Well-Being: Budget Recommendations

Maintain the commitments Ohio made in the last budget, including funding the State Child Protection Allocation (SCPA) at \$110 million per year, Best Practices at \$10 million per year, Foster Care Recruitment and Support at \$5 million per year, Multi-System Youth at \$25 million per year, as well as the Kinship Caregiver Program at \$15 million per year from TANF. Ohio START should be maintained at \$10 million per year.

Continue efforts to stabilize the children services workforce, including maintaining and growing the Children Services Stabilization Fund and Rapid Response Team; developing a public information campaign to build value for the profession; and providing tuition assistance, loan repayment and housing assistance to recruit and retain staff.

Strengthen and expand support for kinship caregivers, including expanding childcare assistance and reducing legal barriers that prevent some kinship caregivers from enrolling their kin children in school and accessing medical care. Ohio should expand policies and best practices for identifying kin caregivers early and throughout a family's involvement with children services. Finally, Ohio should develop a response to the D.O. v. Glisson decision⁴, a federal court decision that requires payments for kin caring for children in foster care.

Lay the groundwork for transformation by supporting the successful implementation of Family First.

This includes prioritizing state support for the ongoing local match for prevention services. It also includes developing and evaluating evidence-based interventions so that children in every county in Ohio have the same opportunity to remain with their family rather than enter foster care, regardless of local resources.

This brief was authored by the Public Children Services Association of Ohio (PCSAO).



¹ Source: Ohio's Interactive Children Services Dashboard, "Point in Time Count of Children in Care". Data downloaded 11/17/2020. Additional calculations by PCSAO to derive average number of children in care over the months Jan. – Oct. 2020.

² The Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) places emphasis on the use of evidence-based prevention services to alleviate the need for placement of children in foster care, and ensuring appropriate settings are used for children in foster care. To read more about Ohio's plan to implement FFPSA, see [ODJFS' Family First Overview](#). For or an overview of the federal legislation, visit see NCSL's [Family First Federal Child Welfare Law](#).

³ [ODJFS Family First Overview](#)

⁴ In D.O. v. Glisson, the U.S. 6th Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980 gives caregivers a privately enforceable right to foster care maintenance payments, and further, that Kentucky cannot distinguish between relative and non-relative foster providers when issuing those maintenance payments. This ruling applies to all states within the 6th Circuit which includes Ohio.