



Keep Kids Safe from Abuse With Adequate Funding and Improvements in How We Respond to and Support Families

When children have experienced — or are at risk of experiencing — abuse or neglect, programs that target prevention or family preservation can safely keep families together or reunite families.

For children who cannot remain safely with their parents, grandparents and other relatives often step up to help raise them, commonly known as kinship care. Kinship care offers a beneficial alternative to foster care and helps to relieve trauma children often face upon removal from their home. Regardless of where a child is placed, children do best when the entire system of child welfare prioritizes supporting families or swiftly finding a permanent family for children who can't return home.

Keep Kentucky kids safe and connected to a family:

Invest in programs that reach vulnerable families to help prevent child abuse

Parenting can be tough. Lack of supports or knowledge of how to handle typical child behaviors can make a stressful situation more stressful. Services that reach parents who may feel overwhelmed by the challenges of parenting—such as HANDS home visitation, parenting education programs, and early childhood programs—can successfully prevent abuse from ever occurring.

Help families stay together safely by investing in family preservation and reunification programs

Sometimes what a family needs most is for the parents or children to get help. Family preservation services are short-term and help parents and children overcome challenges, such as substance abuse, while keeping families safely together. Programs like START address both the child's safety in the home and the substance abuse treatment needs of their parents.

The skills and resources parents gain in family preservation programs reduce the need for out-of-home care for their children. If children do need to enter state care, the stays are shorter and the odds of family reunification are greater. In SFY 2016, it would have cost at least four times more if the children and families who successfully remained together in their homes due to family preservation services had instead been placed in out-of-home care.

Lift the moratorium on the Kentucky Kinship Care Program and provide other supportive services to kinship caregivers

When children cannot safely stay with their parents, placement with a relative can ease the stress of separation and help maintain ties to family. These families need adequate support to be successful. Prior to April 2013, kinship families received \$300 a month per child through the Kinship Care Program to assist with expenses, but the state stopped accepting new applicants in 2013. Beyond financial help, kinship families also need services like respite care, which the state already offers for foster parents.

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Prioritize and support family settings and families on the path to adoption

Foster families and kinship families can be even stronger with services outside of the home, such as therapy or educational programs. And when those families are ready to adopt children, in-home services can make the adoption transition easier, as well as help if issues arise even after adoption is final. Kinship caregivers who are adopting children could use relief from the costs associated with adoption, such as court and filing fees—another support that the state already offers for foster parents.

Ensure adequate funding to recruit and retain workers

In order to respond effectively to families and children in crisis, Department for Community Based Services caseworkers must be skilled and have extensive training. Caseworker turnover impacts child outcomes by taking experienced workers out of the field and slowing down work on a child's case. The state budget is also impacted, with an estimated cost of at least \$13,000 in direct and indirect costs when a caseworker leaves and a new caseworker is hired.

Improve processes to make the system work effectively for children

There are several levers of change that can increase system efficiency and result in better outcomes for kids. The child welfare system is complex and involves the courts, the Cabinet for Health and Family Services, and the community—all of which provide opportunities for improvements, such as tracking data to better identify where caseloads are overwhelming the system, ensuring timely case processing and court hearings, and ensuring relatives have all of the information they need to make an informed decision about becoming a foster parent.

Blueprint for Kentucky's Children Solution:

Keep Kentucky kids safe with investments and system improvements that strengthen families, ensure a family for every child, retain a quality workforce, and incorporate processes that work best for families.