



Kentucky can...

## Strengthen our commonwealth's efforts to prevent child abuse and neglect

Too many Kentucky children are victims of abuse or neglect each year. While Kentucky has made strides to improve the foster care system for children who have experienced abuse or neglect, **more can be done to prevent maltreatment and strengthen families.**

When children have experienced — or are at risk of experiencing — abuse or neglect, investing in programs that target prevention or family preservation can serve as a catalyst to safely keep families together or reunite families.

### Kentucky can invest in the following programs to keep kids safe:

- **Kentucky Strengthening Ties and Empowering Parents (K-STEP) and the Sobriety Treatment and Recovery Team (START) programs.** Substance abuse is a major factor for over half of children removed from their homes by child protective services due to abuse or neglect, especially infants and toddlers. K-STEP and START are proven to help parents achieve sobriety while safely caring for their children.
- **Home visitation programs.** Parenting is tough and the lack of knowledge of how to handle typical child behaviors can make it more stressful. When parents enter evidence-informed home visitation programs, like the Health Access Nurturing Development Services (HANDS) program, early in the pregnancy, the effects are dramatic—increases in adequate prenatal care, lower rates of preterm birth and low birth weight, and lowered incidence of child abuse. Increased supports for evidence-informed home visitation programs will allow for participation incentives in locations where child abuse and neglect case substantiations are high to reach parents who feel overwhelmed and prevent maltreatment from ever occurring.
- **Professionals who respond to child abuse and neglect with forensic services and assessments.** When child abuse or neglect occurs, children need access to the best care in order to recover and heal and for their case to be investigated. The forensic pediatric teams based out of Kentucky's medical schools, as well as the 15 child advocacy centers across the commonwealth, rely on state funding to provide critical services for all children who have experienced maltreatment. An increase in funding to support these programs will allow for our most vulnerable children to get access to the services they need.
- **Kentucky's safety net programs to meet families' basic needs.** Kentucky can protect current investments for families by ensuring that safety net programs, including financial assistance for basic needs, such as food and health care, are not modified in ways that keep children in need of these supports from receiving them.

### Quick facts about child abuse and neglect in Kentucky:

- Over 24,000 Kentucky children were victims of abuse or neglect in 2018.
- Kentucky has the highest rate in the nation of child victims of abuse and has double the national rate for child victims under age 1.
- All Kentucky adults are mandated reporters of child abuse and neglect.

For every **\$1** spent on the START program, Kentucky avoids **\$2.22** in out-of-home care costs

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**Child abuse and neglect is a community issue,  
and we all can play a role in prevention.**

**Kentucky can make commonsense changes to state policy that would protect kids and help kids who have experienced abuse or neglect:**

- Close the gaps in fingerprint background checks and better protect children in foster care by requiring foster care agencies to screen their employees for criminal charges.
- Modify the mandated reporting law to disallow “chain of command” procedures within public and private agencies. These problematic policies allow child abuse to be reported to supervisors rather than directly to proper authorities, which slows response time and undermines mandatory laws.
- Close a gap in state law that allows agencies to report a suspected incidence of child abuse and neglect to their own agency, to ensure a report of child abuse and neglect is properly investigated and communicated to the appropriate agencies when child maltreatment is suspected of an employee of a reporting agency.
- Remove the clergy-penitent privilege exemption in the child maltreatment reporting law to ensure that if abuse is disclosed or suspected by any adult, that abuse is reported to the proper authorities.

Suspected child abuse and neglect should be reported to the Cabinet for Health and Family Services, local law enforcement, the Kentucky State Police, or the County or Commonwealth Attorney’s Office.

**Call 1-877-KY-SAFE-1**

**Only 38% of children who have experienced sexual abuse disclose that abuse.**



- Strengthen the current statute of limitations timeframes for misdemeanor physical and sexual abuse offenses to accommodate for delayed abuse disclosure. If a child experiences abuse, research shows that many wait years, some well into adulthood, to disclose their abuse.

- Develop a communications mechanism between medical professionals and DCBS to ensure the adequate protection of children at risk of abuse and neglect.
- Allow children transitioning out of foster care who have not been adopted to safely reunify with their birth parents by creating a path to reinstatement of parental rights. We must do more to ensure children in foster care nearing the age to transition out of care are connected to a permanent, stable home with a family.

**Blueprint for Kentucky’s Children Solution:**

Strengthening Kentucky’s efforts in child abuse and neglect prevention by investing in programs that keep kids safe and families together and making commonsense changes to state law that would protect kids and help kids who have experienced maltreatment heal