



Kentucky can...

Strengthen the DCBS Workforce to Best Serve Vulnerable Children and Families

While professional standards advise 15 to 18 cases per worker, the average in Kentucky is 26.

Social workers play a critical role in the child welfare system by protecting the well-being of children and supporting families in need. In 2020, nearly 17,000 Kentucky children were found to have experienced abuse or neglect. Of the children who were abused or neglected, there are currently over 9,000 children in out-of-home care and, of those exiting foster care, more than one in three are reunited with their family safely.

Ensuring that the needs of children who experience or who are at risk for maltreatment are addressed is critical to mitigating the lifetime ripple effects of Adverse Childhood Experiences, which result in higher risks for health and mental health issues, and poorer economic and employment outcomes.

- **A qualified and stable child welfare workforce is the foundation of the child welfare system.** Within the Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services, the Department for Community Based Services (DCBS) must be equipped to adequately meet the challenges impacting children and families. Each day, social workers face critical decisions about the lives of these vulnerable children while working in stressful environments with high caseloads, safety concerns, and limited training and resources. These conditions, coupled with low salaries and administrative burdens, affects the recruitment and retention of qualified staff.
- **Caseworker turnover impacts child outcomes by taking experienced workers out of the field and slowing down work on a child's case.** Fewer case workers impact timely investigations of allegations of child abuse or neglect, overseeing families where problems are identified, families connecting to needed counseling or substance use treatment, or help for children in foster care traumatized by maltreatment.

With solid education and training, supervision and support, and access to the appropriate resources, social workers can effectively serve children and families involved in child welfare system. Continued investment in recruiting and retaining quality DCBS staff will increase chances of stability for families and permanency for children and promote smart fiscal outcomes for the state budget.

DCBS staff turnover is costly to an already stressed state budget with a national average of \$54,000 lost for each worker who leaves a state agency.

Blueprint for Kentucky's Children Solution:

Bolster investments in the DCBS workforce to improve outcomes of the most vulnerable children and families.