



Joint Committee to Develop a Master Plan to End Poverty in California
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A. Reforming the "Front Door" of the Foster Care System; Flexible Funding and Title IV-E Waivers

- Current funding of foster care, with federal monies available only after a child has been removed from the home, results in particularly harsh consequences for children and families living in poverty. Without adequate resources for services to help keep families intact, children may be separated from otherwise loving parents, siblings, schools, and their entire support system because of concerns stemming from poverty and homelessness. In particular, far too much money is spent reactively, after a child has been abused, and not nearly enough is available strategically to prevent abuse from occurring in the first place. Similarly, existing foster care funding doesn't adequately allow for up front support of children and families and efforts to keep families intact, whenever possible.
- The State should support the pending federal Title IV-E waiver request that will allow for flexibility in determining how to best allocate federal child welfare dollars. With this cost-neutral funding flexibility, we will be better able to serve children within existing family structures.
- Reforming funding streams and the "front door" of the system will result in reduction in caseloads enabling child welfare agencies to provide intensive supervision and case management to children most in need, who cannot be safely maintained within their family of origin.
- Successful implementation, however, will require an initial investment and should not be presumed to result in immediate cost savings; this investment will be well worth the long-term savings both in dollars and in the lives of at risk children.

B. Educational Needs of Foster Youth

- Children in foster care have consistently poor academic outcomes, increasing the odds that they will experience poverty as adults. Thirty percent function below grade level, over 35% are in special education, 50% have been held back at least one grade level, only 54% - compared to 84% of nonfoster youth - complete high school, and as few as 15% enroll in college.

- State support is critical to enhance accountability among all parts of the system, to realize implementation of new laws, to ensure school stability for foster youth, and to close the educational achievement gap.
- Large numbers of foster children attend nonpublic schools that often provide substandard attention to children with the highest academic needs. Until the State holds these schools accountable for the quality of education offered, we will continue to throw good money after bad – millions of dollars at a time.

C. Mental Health Needs of Foster Youth

- Experts estimate that 30 to 85 percent of youngsters in out-of-home care suffer significant emotional disturbances and report that adolescents living with foster parents or in group homes have a four times higher rate of serious psychiatric disorders than youth living with their own families.
- Too often, mental health needs of foster children are overlooked until they exhibit harmful behavior. The lack of coordination between the child welfare, mental health and school systems results in fragmented provision of services. Children are not properly assessed, no one provider is given the clear responsibility of monitoring the mental health needs of these children, and when mental health services are finally made available, they are often either inadequate or too late to be of significant benefit to the child.
- The resulting cost to the State in both resources and human lives will continue to escalate until *all* agencies develop meaningful ways to work together to address the mental health needs of these children.

D. Permanence for Youth in Foster Care

- Children who emancipate from foster care without a reliable long-term plan and without the support of a committed and caring adult are at high risk of experiencing poverty and homelessness. Within a few years after emancipation, over half of foster youth are unemployed, 40% are on public assistance, 25% become homeless, and an astounding one in five will be incarcerated.
- We need to do more to provide permanence for foster youth, whether that means placement with a supportive relative, identifying an adoptive home, or simply implementing the mandate in AB 408 (Steinberg) that foster youth who emancipate from care be connected to one adult who has played a part in that youth's life.
- Minimal costs associated with requiring child welfare workers to identify an adult who can provide emotional support and guidance to older youth in foster care is far outweighed by the global savings that will result when fewer Californians are homeless, receiving public assistance, or incarcerated. Any effort to repeal AB408 is ill advised and inconsistent with the Governor's stated goal of improving outcomes for children and families in need.

E. Development of Less Restrictive, Community Based Placement Resources

- Increasing the supply of foster family homes with an emphasis on smaller, therapeutic, family-like settings and recruitment of foster parents able to support dependent teens who become parents themselves will reduce the current reliance on expensive residential placements and will increase avenues to permanence.

F. The Needs of Crossover Youth

- California's statutory framework prevents a delinquent child with a preexisting dependency case from being simultaneously supervised by both court systems. This results in a complete severance of dependency jurisdiction when the youth crosses over into delinquency -- an approach at odds with nearly every other state in the country.
- Many former foster children remain under the jurisdiction of the Delinquency Court longer than necessary based on concerns that the termination of probation jurisdiction will leave the child without adequate care, housing, and supervision. This result leaves children in danger of poverty and homelessness and adversely impacts both the child and society.

G. Adequate Support of the Justice System

- Qualified hearing officers and competent counsel are essential to our dependency system. Judicial retention and recruitment should be a top priority.
- The absence of outcome focused data tracking makes it difficult, if not impossible, for courts to develop improved methods of managing their dependency calendars.
- Effective advocacy is critical for the system to function and the needs of children to be addressed. Cost saving measures which result in unfairly compensated counsel and excessive caseloads result in decreased efficiency, poor quality representation, high turnover, and increased expense over time.