

## A POLICY FRAMEWORK

CHAMPS is a national campaign to ensure bright futures for kids in foster care by promoting the highest quality parenting. CHAMPS builds on research that shows loving, supportive families – whether birth, kin, foster or adoptive – are critical to the healthy development of all children. CHAMPS aims to spur policy reforms in 20 to 25 states over five years to prioritize quality foster parenting and ensure that foster parents are equipped with the training and support they need to be the best they can.

The CHAMPS Policy Framework will serve as a guide to state-level policy reform efforts. The Policy Framework is under development by the campaign's policy workgroup, which includes representatives from the campaign's lead partner organizations and other issue experts. This document previews the framework, briefly describes the campaign's focus areas and provides several policy examples that align with the goals of CHAMPS. A more complete Policy Framework will be published in the coming weeks. In addition, the CHAMPS campaign will identify and develop model policies and highlight examples of pending or enacted state policies that promote quality foster parenting.

## THREE FOCUS AREAS FOR STATE POLICY REFORM INCLUDE:

- 1) Child-centered policies that promote quality caregiving. Foster parents are game-changers for children in foster care. Quality foster parenting can help children heal from trauma, keep siblings together, increase stability and ensure that children achieve permanency through reunification with birth families, placement with relatives, or through adoption. A growing body of research about child and adolescent development provides critical insights on how agencies can develop policies that ensure children do not suffer further trauma, and support families to address the unique needs of children.
  - Effective foster parent training is an example of a child-centered policy that promotes quality caregiving. Training and ongoing learning opportunities are important to both new and experienced foster parents and help them build specialized skills they need to meet the individualized needs of children in their care. Effective training programs involve parents in the development and delivery of programs, and support important collaborations among foster parents, birth parents, and key partners such as health care providers and schools. Policies

*(continued)* should ensure that training is holistic, accessible, available on demand, uses the newest technology, and incorporates the latest research about implementation science and adult learning, as health care providers and schools.

**2)** Parents as partners in decision-making. Foster parents are the child welfare system’s primary intervention for helping children in foster care heal, grow and thrive. Families spend more time with the child than any other professional partner, and have valuable information needed to make decisions and identify services and supports to meet the child’s needs. When public agencies and private providers prioritize foster parenting and engage foster parents as valued partners, they enable excellent parenting and achieve better outcomes for children in foster care, including improved health, development, education and permanency.

- Policy reforms should ensure parent involvement in planning for the child’s care and participation in decision making forums such as court hearings and agency case planning meetings. In addition, families should be partners in agency policy and practice processes. Partnering with parents as decision-makers will result in policies and practices that better address the actual needs of families and children. When agencies partner with foster parents, improved outcomes will follow.

**3)** Oversight and accountability to ensure foster parenting is a priority. Having “enough” foster parents will not ensure that children receive quality care unless systems improve and are held accountable for supporting families in meeting the individual needs of children. Many children in foster care have special needs or circumstances that require that foster parents have special skills and interest in caring for specific children. Policymakers, program administrators and service providers should be held accountable for ensuring children have the quality foster parenting they deserve and need, which includes assurances that families have the information, tools and supports they need to succeed in their caregiving.

- One policy approach to ensuring accountability is to require agencies to develop and update plans for recruiting, training and supporting foster parents to care for children who have special needs, such as those who are medically fragile, disabled, have other special health or mental health needs, and for children and youth who identify as LGBTQ or who are pregnant or parenting. Policies might instruct agencies to report on their progress in recruiting for these populations, identify barriers to recruitment and retention, and steps they are taking to address barriers to successfully supporting families caring for these children. Policies might also require agencies to regularly collect and report information on foster parents’ satisfaction on being treated as a partner, the rate of foster parent turnover as well as on reasons why parents decide to stop fostering (e.g. though required exit interviews of parents).



[fosteringCHAMPS.org](https://fosteringCHAMPS.org)

An important resource that has informed the development of the CHAMPS Policy Framework is a white paper published in 2016 titled, "A Movement to Transform Foster Parenting." The policy recommendations in the white paper emerged from discussions with leading experts in the field, and from input from foster parents and alumni from foster care.