

## CHAMPS Policy Priorities

### Promoting Quality Foster Parenting for Children in Foster Care

Foster parenting is a top priority nationally and in states. Rising numbers of children entering foster care, driven partly by the opioid crisis, and the recently enacted *Family First Prevention Services Act*, make it critical to recruit, support, and retain high-quality foster parents to meet the needs of children in their care.

CHAMPS helps policy makers respond to urgent needs. CHAMPS -- Children Need Amazing Parents -- is a policy campaign focused nationally and in individual states to promote high quality foster parenting. By better supporting existing foster parents and developing improved, data-driven approaches to identifying and recruiting new foster parents, more children will receive the stable, loving care they need to grow and flourish.

The CHAMPS Policy Playbook offers policy recommendations to guide decision-makers in making policy improvements. Key principles guide the identification of CHAMPS policy recommendations:

- Innovation and best practice. CHAMPS policies draw on real examples of best practices, including many that have emerged from system reform efforts led by agency leaders involved with the Quality Parenting Initiative. The CHAMPS Policy Playbook also reflects extensive input on what works from foster parents, foster care alumni, child welfare and health policy experts.
- Research and evidence. CHAMPS policies reflect an abundance of research on child and adolescent development that underscores the critical importance of safe, stable families to child well-being. The CHAMPS policy playbook highlights foster parent training, techniques and tools that have been successfully deployed across the country to improve stability and permanency for children.
- Common-sense budgeting. Many policy approaches identified by CHAMPS are no- or low-cost and even create cost savings. Investing in quality foster parenting can save money through shorter lengths in care, fewer costly residential placements, improved physical and mental health, and reduced caseworker time seeking new placements and recruiting new foster parents.
- Child-centered results. CHAMPS policies are grounded in the understanding that children need and do best in loving, supporting families – birth, kin, foster or adoptive. Policies should ensure that foster parents, and case workers, have the training, resources and support they need to ensure children in foster care succeed in school, stay safe & healthy, and have the stable, nurturing care they need to heal and thrive.

## Policy Priorities

When a child needs foster care, quality foster parenting must be a priority. Foster parents are the primary intervention for ensuring the safety and well-being of children in foster care and helping them heal and thrive. To ensure stable, quality foster parenting is a priority, policies should:

- 1. Support relationships between birth and foster families**

Nurturing a child's relationships with birth parents, siblings and extended family minimizes the trauma of foster care and broadens the child's support system. It's vital because more than half of children who enter foster care go home. Achieving this requires new skills and activities from foster parents to nurture the parent-child bond and provide mentorship to birth parents. Child welfare agencies should recruit, train and support foster families and staff to work with birth families and promote co-parenting.
- 2. Implement data-driven recruitment and retention practices**

Maintaining an up-to-date census of licensed foster parents provides agencies with valuable information they can use to improve recruitment and retention activities. A census can help monitor the overall capacity of available foster parents in a community or state. It can also be an important tool for matching children with the most appropriate family, ensuring that the first placement is the best placement.
- 3. Engage foster parents in decision-making**

Foster families spend more time with children than any other professional. They have valuable information needed for decisions about the children's health, education, and other needs. Child welfare agencies should have policies reflect parents as priority partners. Policies should ensure foster parents are engaged in all aspects of case planning including team meetings, court proceedings, visitation and transitions.
- 4. Provide timely access to trusted, dedicated staff and peer support to foster parents**

Foster parents must get the help they need, when they need it, to serve the children in their care. State policy should require that case workers be assigned to support foster parents and offer them access to "warm" help lines where they can connect with experienced foster parents, peer mentors, coaching, and other support networks.
- 5. Prioritize placements with family members**

When children enter foster care, a placement with a relative or a close family friend is often the best option. It helps maintain the child's connection to family and cultural traditions. "Kinship care" can increase stability and safety for children in foster care. State policies should strive to make relatives the first placement and offer the same supports for kin as non-kin foster parents.
- 6. Ensure timely access to physical and mental health services**

Meeting the physical and mental health needs of children in foster care is critical to their well-being. Policies should remove barriers and provide supports that equip and empower foster parents to help ensure children in their care can access needed health services, including comprehensive assessments and timely mental health services.