



children need amazing parents

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CHAMPS New York

Policy Priorities

CHAMPS NY is a statewide group of advocates and providers, working to advance state policies and practices that ensure children in foster care are placed into family-based settings whenever possible, and that foster parents, whether relative or non-relative, are supported so that children experience the best possible permanency and wellbeing outcomes.

We know that children do better when they live in families, and particularly in families with relatives whom they know and trust. While New York has made tremendous strides toward reducing the number of children in foster care by prioritizing preventive services, the State can do more to ensure that, when foster care becomes necessary, children are nurtured by families who are supported to be the best possible caregivers.

To that end, New York should:

- ▶ **Identify and engage kinship resources early on:** Integrate identification of kinship resources, including father engagement, into preventive casework. Doing so would strengthen preventive work, by building support a network around the family, and would also help to prepare in the event that entry into foster care becomes necessary.
- ▶ **Maintain and utilize a robust Foster Parent Census:** Support local districts in collecting and analyzing data on their existing pool of foster parents, and comparing geography and skills with the census of foster children
- ▶ **Make it easier for relatives to become foster parents:** review and update policies to include expedited licensing for kin, removing unnecessary barriers that may prevent kin from becoming foster parents, and model licensing standards for foster parents.
- ▶ **Explore policies that prioritize family-based care, such as:**
 - **Kin-First Firewall Policy:** Establish a practice standard that requires approval by a senior child welfare director for all non-kin placements to ensure front line staff have exhausted all options for kinship care.
 - **Residential Care Gatekeeping Policy:** Establish a practice standard that would require senior child welfare staff to review the therapeutic necessity for placing a child in a residential care facility. This policy – already in use in Westchester County – will require that frontline staff provide medical documentation of the mental and/or behavioral health need of the child that would necessitate placement.

- ▶ **Strengthen supports for kinship caregivers:** Provide kinship caregivers with full disclosure of options and considerations within the first week of placement, and on an on-going basis throughout involvement with the local district. Also consider:
 - Clarifying that relative caregivers should still be eligible to become foster parents after a child has lived with them for 6 months or more, even if this means that they will not be eligible for IV-E funding.
 - Ensuring that kinship caregivers are referred to department of family assistance kinship service programs so they can access resources and supports available outside of the formal foster care system.
 - Encouraging and supporting local districts in implementing a needs assessment for kinship caregivers and offering limited case management so that kinship caregivers are supported and can access services in their community.

- ▶ **Improve support for foster families,** both relative and non-relative by:
 - Making respite care more readily available: Establish a standard and secure funding to make respite care available two days per month – because all parents need a break.
 - Making scheduling and transportation work for families: Establish flexible scheduling of mandatory training to meet the needs of working families and be held responsible for transporting kids to visitations.

- ▶ **Structure financing in ways that incentivize family-based care, including:**
 - **Foster & Kinship Family Incentive Fund:** create an incentive fund through a public-private partnership that would support localities in developing and innovating in their efforts related to family-based foster care. Such funding would be intended to create practice change that would be long-lasting and sustainable. The funding could be used to cover expenses such as:
 - Targeted recruitment of kin and foster families
 - Expenses related to supporting new relative foster parents in meeting the requirements and expectations of the foster care system
 - Transportation of children to court, visitation appointments
 - Respite care for foster and kin families
 - Financial assistance to support normalcy activities
 - **KinGAP Financing Reform:** re-structure KinGAP subsidy payments in a manner similar to adoption subsidies, outside of the capped Foster Care Block Grant. The current structure caps the counties' ability to pay and limits the use of this important permanency option for children.

To learn more about CHAMPS New York and how to get involved, please contact Kari Siddiqui at KSiddiqui@scaany.org or Brad Hansen at bhansen@ftnys.org.