

Opportunities for State Legislators to Engage and Champion Foster Parenting Policy Improvements

One of the most powerful ways we can help children in foster care is by ensuring safe and stable family-based care. What's more, foster parenting is emerging as a top policy priority nationally and in states. Rising numbers of children entering foster care and new expectations associated with the enactment of the Family First Prevention Services Act bring new urgency to the need for solutions to recruiting, supporting and retaining high-quality foster parents to meet the needs of children in their care.

CHAMPS – Children Need Amazing Parents – is a policy campaign focused nationally and in states to promote high quality foster parenting. CHAMPS offers a Policy Playbook featuring a six-point policy framework for strengthening foster parenting policies. CHAMPS encourages state legislators to review the Playbook and consider different ways they can lead policy improvement efforts in their states.

Legislators can:

- 1. Sponsor legislation.** Engage lawmakers, child welfare agency leaders and key stakeholders (including foster, birth and kinship families and youth) in the development of legislative policy that provides the framework and the resources necessary to create a child welfare system that prioritizes and supports family-based care.
- 2. Facilitate information sharing about challenges and solutions.** Hold hearings and/or forums to highlight what's working to recruit and support foster families and where improvements are needed. Ask the child welfare agency to share data such as: number of foster homes available, number of children needing homes, foster parent turnover rates, and number of teens in family-based settings (and those who are not).
- 3. Stay abreast of agency decision making.** Require child welfare agency to share and report to legislature on relevant agency policy, such as the state's diligent recruitment plan, foster family licensing standards, and foster parent training and support services.
- 4. Promote cross-agency collaboration.** Encourage child welfare, early learning, health, mental health and other agencies to establish a cross-agency work group to ensure coordination and a child-centered approach. Be sure to involve multiple agencies in decision-making about the mental health, substance abuse and parenting services that are provided to birth, foster and kinship families.
- 5. Promote new partnerships.** Encourage the child welfare agency to collaborate with foster parents, community and faith-based partners, employers and others as they develop and implement their foster parent recruitment and retention plan.
- 6. Help build community support and awareness.** Publicly show support for foster families and highlight the critical role they play in helping our most vulnerable children and families heal and thrive. Encourage child welfare agencies and community partners to do the same!