

RECOMMENDATION #1 - CORE SET OF SUPPORTIVE SERVICES

Increase the stability and quality of family-based care for all children in foster care and create a new norm of support for kin and non-kin foster families by requiring child welfare agencies to make a core set of supportive services available to all families caring for children in foster care.

MAKING THE CASE:

- When kids need foster care, the most powerful way to help them is by providing stable, well-supported foster families, including kin and non-kin.
- Children in foster care often face significant physical, social, emotional and educational challenges. This is why it's critical that foster families are trained and are well-supported in their caregiving.
- Supporting caregivers contributes to placement stability, which in turn improves children's outcome in education, health, well-being and permanency
- Support for foster families is associated with improved foster parent retention. Research has found that as many as 40 percent of foster parents stop providing foster care due to lack of agency support.
- With the Family First Act, Congress emphasized the need for children to be in families, not institutions. Now it's time to make sure that can happen by providing foster families the support they need.

RECOMMENDATION #2:

INNOVATIVE, FEDERAL GRANT PROGRAM TO PREVENT & REDUCE USE OF CONGREGATE CARE

Accelerate the goal of eliminating the inappropriate use of congregate care for children and youth through a targeted grant program to spur innovation in (1) preventing congregate care placements and (2) shifting youth from congregate care placements to well-supported family-based care.

MAKING THE CASE:

- Too many children and youth still end up in costly congregate care settings. Most children's need can be met by families, if those families have support.
- Congregate is often used even when there is no clinical reason for it. And it costs 6 to 10 times as much as family care. By reducing congregate care and better supporting families, children will fare better and we can save money.
- Much research exists about the negative risks and harm associated with congregate care. Congregate care:
 - places youth at increased risk for physical & sexual abuse compared with family-based care
 - increases likelihood of behavior problems
 - is associated with an increased involvement in the juvenile justice system
 - is associated with worse educational and work outcomes, including higher dropout rates
- Children and youth of color are more likely to experience congregate care. Black male children and youth are almost 30 percent more likely to experience congregate care than other children and youth in care.

**RECOMMENDATION # 3:
REVAMP FEDERAL REQUIREMENTS OF STATE DILIGENT RECRUITMENT PLANS**

Spur lasting improvements to foster parent recruitment, support and retention by revamping outdated federal policy on “Diligent Recruitment Plans.” Doing so will mobilize agencies to create and implement effective, data-driven approaches to engaging and partnering with kin and non-kin foster families and result in better outcomes for children and youth.

MAKING THE CASE:

- Federal policy is outdated. Guidance to child welfare agencies on foster parent recruitment has been the same since 1994.
- Federal guidance is not aligned with the primary intent of the law, which is that agencies should have a racially and culturally diverse pool of foster families that reflects the children in care.
- Guidance doesn’t talk at all about relative searches, which we know are key to finding permanency for children.
- Current recruitment policy is not focused on results, and does not create expectations or incentives for placement stability, retention, family engagement.
- Current policy overlooks the importance of retention and support.
- State child welfare agencies lack the data to target recruitment strategies and improve retention.

**RECOMMENDATION #4:
A NATIONAL CENSUS ON FAMILY-BASED CARE & CONGREGATE CARE**

Have the Department of Health and Human Services produce an annual, national census to highlight data and trends in family-based care and congregate care to keep policymakers and the public informed about the capacity of the nation’s foster care safety net.

MAKING THE CASE:

- There is no national data on the number of foster families available to care for children and youth in foster care. Communities need better information on local need.
- The last national survey of foster parents was conducted in 1989 by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.
- Generating publicly available information about children in congregate care will help decision makers understand trends and take action to reduce inappropriate use of congregate care.
- Having HHS produce a national census will provide a model for states and localities on how to collect and share data in ways that can drive better outcomes for children.