



Challenges Facing Florida's Community-Based Child Welfare System

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Dear Fellow Taxpayer,

The state's community-based child welfare system is responsible for the care and well-being of Florida's maltreated youth. Over time, child welfare practices have improved, and now place even greater emphasis on the swift removal of children from potentially dangerous situations, but this change has resulted in higher numbers of children entering an already stretched system.

Unfortunately, there have not been adequate resources to create equivalent improvements in services or staff, allowing demand on the system to climb to the highest it has been since 2008. There are not enough available services to meet the needs of these new youth and case managers charged with their care are facing higher and higher caseloads, leading to increases in turnover and reductions in the timeliness and care with which cases are able to be handled. These issues ensure that demand will continue to grow, hurt the likelihood that children in the system will find their forever homes, and cost taxpayers millions of dollars.

It is essential that the state address these important issues before our children and taxpayers suffer the consequences. Front end investment in services will help reduce demand, reducing the fiscal burden on taxpayers and creating better opportunities and outcomes for Florida's maltreated children and adolescents. It is our hope that the discussion in this report will help the Legislature in any reform efforts.

Sincerely,

Dominic M. Calabro
Dominic M. Calabro
President & CEO

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Protecting Florida’s abused, abandoned, neglected, and at-risk youth is an issue near and dear to the hearts of many Floridians, and the state’s community-based child welfare system is responsible for the care and well-being of many of these children and adolescents. Currently, there are more than 22,000 children in foster care across the state of Florida, many of whom arrive in foster care as victims of abuse and/or neglect. Sadly, that number that continues to grow.

In this study, Florida TaxWatch evaluates the two primary issues contributing to, and subsequently worsened by this demand—workforce instability and increasing need for services. The study also reviews:

- additional factors contributing to these issues;
- the societal and economic impacts of these issues;
- the strategies used by other states to address these issues; and
- the value these other strategies have for Florida.

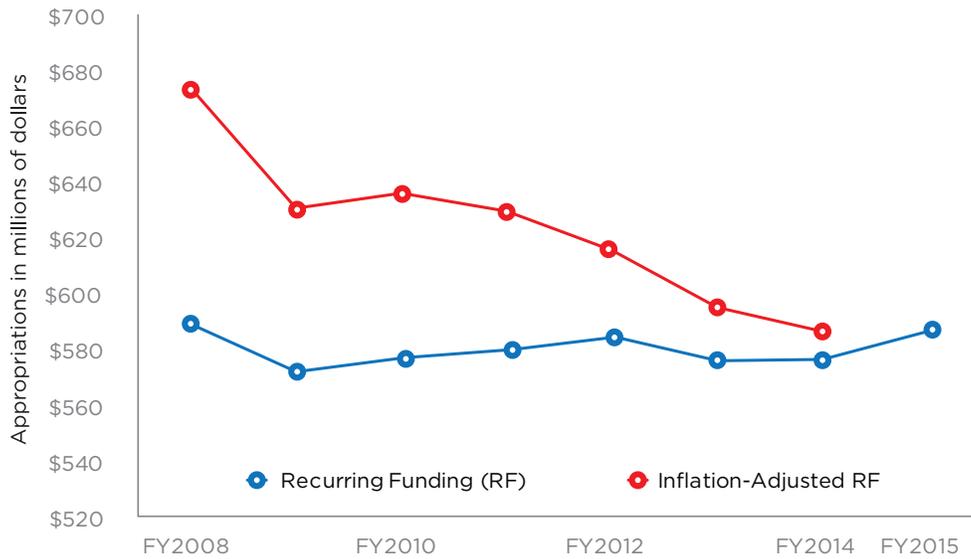
The study concludes by recommending that the state examine options that improve service accessibility and availability and enhance workforce stability.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, shifts in child welfare system practices have increased the number of children being brought to the attention of Florida’s child welfare system. Investments in services that prevent child removals (the need to remove children from their homes) and improve permanency outcomes (outcomes resulting in adoption or reunification with the child’s original family) have not expanded or changed to meet these shifts in practice. For many years, the statewide core funding for the state’s community-based child welfare system has been relatively stagnant or even reduced. Accounting for inflation, funding for community-based care providers has decreased by almost 13 percent (See Fig. 1).¹ This lack of adequate financial resources drives up caseloads and leads to case manager workforce instability. These service and workforce issues contribute to increased demand for child welfare and result in longer stays in the system and negative child permanency outcomes, at great taxpayer expense.

¹ Community-based care providers’ fiscal data reported by child welfare leadership.

Figure 1. Recurring Core Funding for Child Welfare Providers
(Actual and Inflated) FY2008-FY2015²



This report examines these issues and provides recommendations to expand services in ways that promote service availability and access as well as to increase opportunities that educate, expand, and support staff in order to reduce turnover and ensure greater workforce stability. Together these solutions will save taxpayer dollars by improving outcomes and system efficacy.

BACKGROUND

To promote equal access and ensure cost-efficiency, the 1998 Florida Legislature mandated that the Department of Children and Families (DCF) contract with private non-profit organizations, referred to as community-based care organizations (CBCs), to provide child protective services³ and programs across the state.⁴

The relationship between the CBCs and DCF is similar to that seen in Florida’s behavioral health care system, which was also privatized⁵ into a community-based model.⁶ While child welfare services are now locally managed, the state is still ultimately responsible for the children coming into the system.⁷ DCF contracts with lead agencies in designated areas of the state, which help coordinate local services for children and families through the CBCs, serving over 40,000 children and families.⁸

2 Community-based care providers’ fiscal data reported by child welfare leadership.

3 Including: adoptive, independent living, emergency shelter, residential group care, foster care, therapeutic foster care, intensive residential treatment, case management, post placement supervision, permanent foster care and family reunification, shelter care, and family preservation services. Source: “Ensuring the Long-Term Success of Florida’s Community-Based Child Welfare System.” (March 2006) Florida TaxWatch Research Institute.

4 “Ensuring the Long-Term Success of Florida’s Community-Based Child Welfare System.” (March 2006) Florida TaxWatch.

5 While the switch to a community-based model is more of an “outsourcing,” leadership in these sectors refer to it as “privatization.”

6 “Analysis of Florida’s Behavioral Health Managing Entity Model.” (March 2015). Florida TaxWatch.

7 “Ensuring the Long-Term Success of Florida’s Community-Based Child Welfare System.” (March 2006). Florida TaxWatch.

8 “Child Welfare Services Trend Report.” Accessed September 2015. Center for Child Welfare.

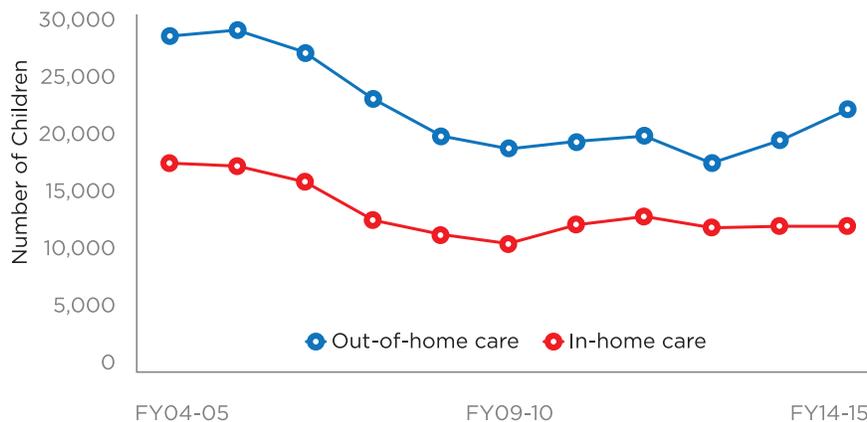
Increases in Child Welfare Demand

Increasing demand on the child welfare system has been a consistent issue. A 2005 study found that the ratio of child cases to case managers in Florida was 24 to 1.⁹ This was substantially lower than pre-privatization numbers in FY1999 (35 to 1),¹⁰ but well above Florida's standard of 14 to 1¹¹ and still double the Child Welfare League of America's nationally recommended caseload standard of 12 to 1.¹² A decade later, this issue persists; reports show Florida's current caseload ratios as high as 22 cases per case manager.¹³

In an attempt to bring these ratios down, the 2015 Legislature appropriated an additional \$16 million for community-based child welfare, based on August 2014 projections for the number of children expected to come into the system over the next year, but the number of children entering the system well surpassed these projections.

Between December and May of FY2015 alone, the state saw an 11 percent increase (2,142 children) in children in out-of-home care, a greater increase than was seen for all of FY2014 (10 percent, or 1,708 children),¹⁴ raising the number of children in out-of-home care to their highest levels since 2008, while the number of children being maintained in-home has leveled off (See Fig. 2).¹⁵ This increase is a result of a number of factors, particularly statewide changes in the processes for deciding whether children should be removed and placed into state care.

Figure 2. Number of Children in Out-of-Home Care & In-Home Care (FY2005-2015)¹⁶



9 "Child Welfare System Performance Mixed in First Year of Statewide Community-Based Care." (2006). Florida State Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability (OPPAGA).

10 *Ibid.*

11 "Department of Children and Families: Exhibit D-3A: Expenditures by Issue and Appropriation Category." (2015). Florida Fiscal Portal.

12 "Child Protective Investigator and Child Protective Investigator Supervisor Educational Qualifications, Turnover, and Working Conditions Status Report." (2014). DCF.

13 "Department of Children and Families: Exhibit D-3A: Expenditures by Issue and Appropriation Category." (2015). Florida Fiscal Portal.

14 "Child Welfare Services Trend Report." Accessed September 2015. Center for Child Welfare.

15 *Ibid.*

16 *Ibid.*

Incidents in 2013 resulted in an almost immediate response from the child welfare system and prompted a major shift in methodology. This shift was later fully implemented by the 2014 Legislature, which appropriated money for DCF to hire 200 additional child protective investigators¹⁷ and passed a number of important child welfare reforms.¹⁸

The most notable of these reforms changed a policy that had previously placed emphasis on keeping families together,¹⁹ improving child permanency outcomes by working with families, but often meant allowing kids to remain in potentially dangerous home situations.²⁰ The reform, and the addition of extra investigative staff, improved the identification of potential threats and increased the number of children brought to the attention of the child welfare system,²¹ but out-of-home care and demand on the child welfare system began to skyrocket without matching increases in funding, case manager staff, and services to maintain child safety at home (when appropriate) or ensure children in out-of-home care achieve permanency in a timely manner.

PROBLEMS FACING THE SYSTEM

Increases in out-of-home care, in combination with inadequate resources, have resulted in a self-perpetuating cycle of issues, including workforce instability and increasing need for services. These issues are cyclical because, in addition to being problematic on their own, they also encourage future increases in demand by negatively affecting system efficacy.

Workforce Instability

The annual turnover rate among case managers in Florida averages 37 percent statewide, but can run as high as 80 percent in certain areas.²² While low pay likely plays a part (Florida's child, family, and school social workers make almost 10 percent less than the national average),²³ research shows that pay is not the most important factor in case managers' career decisions.

Most case managers see their profession as more of a calling than an occupation.²⁴ Of the most competent case managers in Florida, over 96 percent say that their greatest job satisfaction comes from helping children.²⁵ What *does* have an impact on turnover are workloads and environments.

Case managers often work extensive hours, and enter extremely difficult, at times life-threatening,

17 "Changes Ahead in Welfare, But Enough?" (May 2, 2014). Sun Sentinel Editorial Board. Sun Sentinel.

18 Senate Bill 1666: Child Welfare. (2014).

19 *Ibid.*

20 *Ibid.*

21 Interviews with community-based child welfare leadership

22 "Florida child-welfare agencies battling high staff turnover—80 percent in some parts of state." (Sep. 8, 2014). Margie Menzel, The Florida Times-Union.

23 TaxWatch review of 2014 Bureau of Labor Statistics Occupational Employment Statistics for Child, Family, and School Social workers.

24 "Child Welfare Worker Recruitment and Retention: Resilient Child Welfare Worker Interviews." (2006). Michigan State University School of Social Work

25 "Florida child-welfare agencies battling high staff turnover—80 percent in some parts of state." (Sep. 8, 2014). Margie Menzel, The Florida Times-Union.

situations. The weight of these situations, plus frequent contact with traumatized children and high caseloads due to insufficient staffing levels, can result in stress disorders that exhibit many of the same symptoms as post-traumatic stress, leading to burnout and depression among many case managers, causing them to resign.²⁶

Workforce instability also takes a toll on children in the system. As case managers leave their positions, their cases are handed off to new case managers, resulting in delays in the timeliness of children's permanency outcomes as new case managers need to be trained and familiarized with children's situations. These create inefficiencies that lead to longer stays, higher caseloads, and increased demand on the system.

To demonstrate the severity of this issue, research examining children coming into the child welfare system and exiting to permanency within a 21 month period showed that a child in foster care who only has one case manager in that time frame has the highest (75 percent) chance of either being reunited with his or her family or becoming part of another family through adoption, while the transition of that child's case to a second manager drops the likelihood of those outcomes to 17.5 percent.²⁷ Having four managers within the 21 month period saw the child's chances drop to 2 percent.²⁸ Of children with 6 or 7 case managers during the given timeframe, 0.1 percent were adopted or reunited with their families home.²⁹ While the severity of these results occur due to higher numbers of case managers handling individual cases over a short period of time, they indicate that case manager turnover (and the transfer of cases) can have a significant impact on the outcomes of children coming into state care. All the more reason state investment in front-end services that prevent child removals and maintain child safety in-home, as well as back-end services that help children already under state care achieve permanency, are so important.

Increasing Need for Services

Child welfare services provide many educational, behavioral, and other supports that are essential to the success of children and families who come into contact with the system. Unfortunately, with limited resources comes a disconnect between the number of children in need of services and the number of services that are accessible or available. While the 2006 switch to federal IV-E waivers that allowed greater funding flexibility for front-end services³⁰ was helpful, it has not been enough to bridge this gap; and recent legislative appropriations³¹ only just begin to scratch the surface of remedying budget cuts for services from previous years and do not function as a sustainable replacement for recurring funding.

26 "Secondary Traumatic Stress: A Fact Sheet for Child-Serving Professionals." (2011). The National Child Traumatic Stress Network.; "Burnout/Secondary Trauma." Accessed in September 2015. U.S. Department of Health & Human Services: Children's Bureau; "Compassion Fatigue in Child Welfare." (2009). Stephanie Rakoczy, The New Social Worker.

27 "Review of Turnover in Milwaukee County State Agency Child Welfare Ongoing Case Management Staff." (January, 2005). Connie Flower, Jess McDonald, & Michael Sumski.

28 *Ibid.*

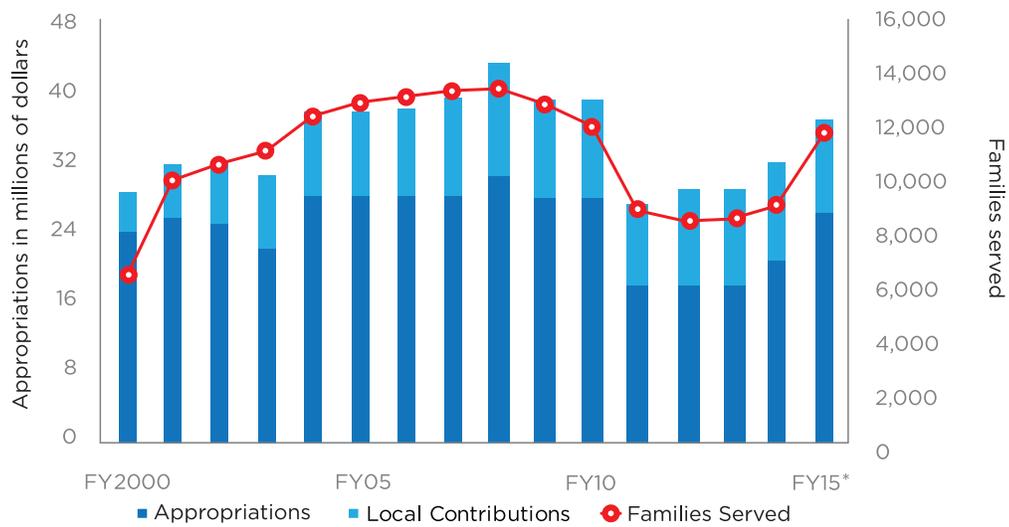
29 "Review of Turnover in Milwaukee County State Agency Child Welfare Ongoing Case Management Staff." (January, 2005). Connie Flower, Jess McDonald, & Michael Sumski.

30 "Child Welfare Waiver Demonstration Project for the State of Florida: Initial Design and Implementation Report." (2006.) USF Center for Child Welfare.

31 "Shelley Katz: Moving forward on child welfare." (July 9, 2014). Shelley Katz, Tallahassee Democrat. "Florida Invests in Child Abuse Prevention Program." (July 1, 2015). Tori Walker, The Ledger.

Healthy Families Florida, as an example, is one of Florida’s most widespread prevention programs. Despite its success, it consistently relies on local contributions to adequately meet the needs of the communities it serves and it suffered budget cuts in FY2011 that severely impacted the scope of the program (See Fig. 3). It recently had its funding restored to non-inflation-adjusted FY2010 levels, but incoming reports of potential maltreatment have increased by 125 percent since FY2010,³² indicating that this reestablished level of state funding, even in combination with the continued generosity of local donors, is not enough to allow the program to cope with recent surges in demand. This greatly inhibits availability and access to services for the many children and families that need them.

Figure 3. Healthy Families Florida: Appropriations, Local Contributions, and Families Served³³



*: Projections for FY2015 families served based on data from FY2000-FY2014.

At the front end, many families at risk of child maltreatment or neglect have trouble accessing prevention or safety management services because they lack adequate transportation and have difficulty making it to a service facility.³⁴ This problem is only worsened by the fact that services intended to provide transportation assistance to these families have been reported as a statewide area of critical unmet need, as have in-home prevention services that sought to alleviate the transportation issue. Overall, about 50 percent of state child welfare providers identified in-home services like supervision and monitoring, Safe at Home,³⁵ and crisis intervention as areas of critical unmet need.³⁶ Family involvement in these types of front end services is essential for the prevention of child maltreatment and critical to ensuring that the child welfare system is not overwhelmed.

32 “Healthy Families Florida Funding History.” (Oct. 25, 2013). Healthy Families Florida. Florida’s 2014 General Appropriations Act; Florida’s 2015 General Appropriations Act.

33 *Ibid.*

34 Interviews with community-based child welfare leadership.

35 The Safe at Home in-home program provides education and crisis counseling, while keeping families together.

36 Florida Child Welfare Services Gap Analysis Report.” (2014). University of South Florida (USF) Center for Child Welfare.

At the back end, children in out-of-home care often have specific or complex needs for which appropriate services and programs either do not exist or are already at capacity. Crossover youth, or children and adolescents with dual involvement in the juvenile justice and child welfare systems, are often a prime example of this issue. These types of youth comprise up to 30 percent of the child welfare population across the country and often have complex problems that require a multitude of services;³⁷ the majority suffer from education, mental health, and sexual abuse issues.³⁸

Unfortunately, child welfare agencies are not often afforded adequate time to prepare services or housing to receive these children.³⁹ These issues make placements for crossover youth difficult and limit their chances at successful permanency outcomes.⁴⁰ With the number of children in out-of-home care expanding, the types of services available must also grow to accommodate the most vulnerable within the population.

TAXPAYER IMPACT

Workforce and service issues not only contribute to increased demand and fewer positive child outcomes, but also pose a significant economic problem for taxpayers. The cost of turnover for one case manager (comprised of, at minimum, costs for additional training and recruitment) falls around \$10,000.⁴¹ Florida employs almost 3,800 case managers,⁴² of which an estimated 37 percent (approximately 1,400) resign and are replaced within one year, which costs the state approximately \$14 million annually.

Lack of services that prevent higher levels of or prolonged child welfare system involvement also has a significant cost, as taxpayers could pay up to \$70,000 per year to care for one child in out-of-home care.⁴³ With more than 22,000 children in this category across the state, Florida taxpayers could pay more than \$1 billion a year for children in out-of-home care costs, and these numbers are only growing.⁴⁴

37 “Crossover Youth: The Intersection of Child Welfare and Juvenile Justice.” (November 15, 2012). Brian Goldstein, Juvenile Justice Information Exchange.

38 *Ibid.*

39 “Introduction to the NYC Crossover Youth Practice Model.” (June 23, 2014). The Center for Juvenile Justice Reform and Casey Family Programs.

40 Interviews with child welfare leadership

41 Estimates place the cost between 33 and 66 percent of the cost of a case manager’s annual salary. The average child services worker makes about \$41,000 annually but entry-level case managers typically make less. Therefore, a conservative estimate would fall near \$10,000 per turnover. Sources: “High Caseloads: How do they Impact Delivery of Health and Human Services.” (January 2010). Social Work Policy Institute; TaxWatch analysis of U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics employment data for Florida’s child, family, and school social workers. Data from May 2014.

42 Includes case managers, case management support staff, and case management specialists. Source: “Florida Safe Families Network (FSFN): Information Technology Strategic Opportunities Overview.” (2014). DCF.

43 “Home Visiting: A proven model to benefit families and save taxpayer dollars!” Florida State University Center for Prevention and Early Intervention Policy.

44 “Child Welfare Services Trend Report.” Accessed September 2015. Center for Child Welfare.

Furthermore, children who have prolonged stays in the system, or age out of the system before being adopted or reunited with their own families, are at higher risk for several outcomes that negatively impact their quality of life and cost to taxpayers, including teen pregnancy, low education, homelessness, and juvenile or criminal justice system involvement:

- Young women with long stays in/that age out of the child welfare system are over twice as likely as their non-child-welfare-involved peers to become pregnant by age 18.⁴⁵ Many of these births require child welfare involvement and other publicly funded programs and services that can amount to hundreds of thousands of dollars over a child's lifetime.
- About one third of youth aging out of the child welfare system do not have a high school or equivalent degree⁴⁶ and less than 2 percent go on to pursue bachelor's degrees,⁴⁷ despite the fact that 70 percent of children in foster care report a desire to go to college.⁴⁸ One study found that each child that drops out of high school costs Florida \$260,000 in lost earnings, taxes, and productivity.⁴⁹
- About 65 percent of children aging out of the child welfare system do not have housing,⁵⁰ 33 percent have household incomes below the poverty line,⁵¹ and almost 60 percent are unemployed.⁵² Youth ages 18-23 comprise the fastest growing segment of the homeless population in Florida.⁵³
- Foster youth are up to 10 times more likely to enter the juvenile justice system than their counterparts in the general population and 25 percent of youth who age out of child welfare are incarcerated within two years of leaving the system.⁵⁴ Each year about 400 youth age out of the system.⁵⁵ If 25 percent of them are incarcerated for one year as adults, they could cost taxpayers as much as \$20 million in criminal justice expenditures by 2025.⁵⁶

45 "Teen Pregnancy Among Young Women In Foster Care: A Primer." (2011). Heather Boonstra, Guttmacher Policy Review, 14(2).

46 "Housing Opportunities for Children Aging out of Foster Care." (2012). The Florida Housing Coalition.

47 "Foster Youth." (2012). The Indiana Youth Institute.

48 "Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth." (2011). M.E. Courtney et al., Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago.

49 "Before the 'either-or' era: Reviving bipartisanship to improve America's schools." (2008). Riley, R.W. & Peterson, T.K., Education Week, 28(5), 32-36.

50 "Foster Youth." (2012). The Indiana Youth Institute.

51 *Ibid.*

52 "Housing Opportunities for Children Aging out of Foster Care." (2012). The Florida Housing Coalition.

53 *Ibid.*

54 "Foster Youth." (2012). The Indiana Youth Institute.

55 "Extended foster care keeps kids in system until age 21." (April 7, 2014). Gary Pinell, Highlands Today, Tampa Tribune.

56 The average per diem cost for a Florida inmate is \$49.49.

SOLUTIONS FROM OTHER STATES

To reduce demand on Florida's child welfare system, options must be examined that reduce these negative outcomes. This can be accomplished by enhancing the child welfare system through the improvement of workforce stability and the promotion of a more accessible/available child welfare services array.

Creating Workforce Stability

Given Florida's current turnover rate, improvements in workforce stability could save millions of dollars in training and recruitment costs the state spends just to maintain current staffing levels each year.⁵⁷

In addition to the overarching need for additional case managers to drive down caseloads, turnover among Florida's case managers suggests that they may benefit from higher levels of situational preparation before entering the field. Approximately 55 percent of applicants coming into child welfare work have little to no knowledge of child welfare services until after college⁵⁸ and the most resilient case managers cite the availability of internships and volunteer opportunities during that time as a critical factor in helping them determine whether child welfare was the correct field for them or not.⁵⁹ Alterations of social work or other field-related degree curricula to better reflect the demands of case manager work are also shown to help.⁶⁰ Changes in these areas not only ensure a prepared workforce, but may attract more applicants to case manager positions. Several states have taken steps based on these concepts:

- **Maine:** developed a best practices model that included internships as a core factor within their recruitment and selection processes.⁶¹
- **California:** Los Angeles County implemented simulation labs to provide firsthand experience of going into homes and dealing with reported incidents of maltreatment. It is included as part of the 52 weeks of training required by the state to earn a Master's in social work.⁶²

57 37 percent of 3,800 is approximately 1,400. Multiplied times per case manager turnover costs (up to \$27,000), this results in a cost up to \$37.8 million.

58 Presentation by Kids Central, Inc.: "CPS Workforce Employment and Retention Issues: National Landscape and Florida Focus." (March 18, 2014). Presented to the House Health Families Committee.

59 "Child Welfare Worker Recruitment and Retention: Resilient Child Welfare Worker Interviews." (2006). Michigan State University School of Social Work.

60 One study noted that, while courses traditionally meant to prepare students for work in child welfare (like psychology and social work) have all been shown to be beneficial, many tenured case managers have expressed that they would have felt better prepared with formal education in other position-specific areas, like child development, working with the abused, and the court system. "Child Welfare Worker Recruitment and Retention: Resilient Child Welfare Worker Interviews." (2006). Michigan State University School of Social Work.

61 "Child Welfare Staff Recruitment and Retention: An Evidence-Based Training Model." (2007). University of Southern Maine.

62 "DCFS aims to better prepare next generation of social workers." (Feb. 17, 2014). Christina Villacorte, Los Angeles Daily News.

- **Pennsylvania:** The Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare’s Office of Children, Youth and Families’ collaborates with the University of Pittsburgh’s School of Social Work to provide skill-based coursework to case managers at all 67 state agencies.⁶³

Once in the field, we must also ensure that the psychological needs of case managers are addressed. Many states have no protocols for dealing with this problem or only issue one-time trainings.⁶⁴ Ohio, for example, just has a list of suggestions for case managers in need of stress reduction.⁶⁵ But for states that do have supports in place, caseworker trainings, ongoing support groups, debriefings after crises, and individual consultations play a significant role in maintaining workforce stability:⁶⁶

- **Connecticut:** worked with the National Center for Child Traumatic Stress to develop work-related stress seminars that engage child welfare, behavioral health, and juvenile justice professionals.⁶⁷
- **Colorado, Arizona, North Dakota, and other western states:** provide consultations for child welfare professionals who have been directly impacted by fatalities, assaults, and other crises as well as provide training seminars that teach case managers to cope with work-related stressors.
- **Massachusetts and California:** have on-site group sessions, ongoing trainings, and activities that promote resiliency.⁶⁸

Reduced turnover will improve outcomes for children by allowing case managers more time to spend directly helping children and their families.⁶⁹ These improved results will create cost-savings that may be reinvested to create more case manager positions (driving down caseloads) as well as create a resilient child welfare system that could potentially attract even more qualified and experienced individuals to apply for positions and strengthen the workforce further.⁷⁰

Promoting Accessibility and Availability of Services

A number of states have also implemented policies and programs to address accessibility and availability issues within their service arrays. Regarding front-end services, many states have acknowledged that in-home and transportation assistance services that foster family involvement in prevention are worth the investment:

63 “Beyond Child Welfare Education & Training: Pennsylvania’s Dynamic University-Agency Partnership for Transfer of Learning, Quality Improvement & Organizational Effectiveness.” (Sep. 11, 2013). National Child Welfare Workforce Institute.

64 “Addressing Secondary Traumatic Stress.” (2009). Julie Collins, Child Welfare League of America.

65 “Managing Stress as a Child Welfare Worker: Caseworker Readiness Activity.” Ohio Child Welfare Training Program.

66 “Addressing Secondary Traumatic Stress.” (2009). Julie Collins, Child Welfare League of America.

67 “Addressing Secondary Traumatic Stress Among Child Welfare Staff: A Briefing.” (2012). ACS-NYU Children’s Trauma Institute.

68 *Ibid.*

69 “Caseload and Workload Management.” (April 2010). Child Welfare Information Gateway.

70 “Child Welfare Worker Recruitment and Retention: Resilient Child Welfare Worker Interviews.” (2006). Michigan State University School of Social Work

- **Texas:** signed bills into law in 2013 that expanded home visitation programs and gave them an additional \$7.9 million to prevent child abuse and child welfare system involvement.⁷¹
- **Montana:** also invested in in-home services and launched the “Protect Montana Kids” initiative and expanded its evidence-based home visitation program, Safe Care Augmented Home Visiting, statewide.⁷²
- **Delaware,⁷³ Minnesota,⁷⁴ Washington⁷⁵ and New York:⁷⁶** also took the in-home services approach. These states implemented the Family Assessment Response (FAR) program, an evidence-based practice that provides in-home services⁷⁷ and allows social workers a per-family stipend to allow spending flexibility for products or services that may help at-risk families get back on track, including auto repairs to address a lack of transportation.⁷⁸

The cost of prevention services like in-home programs has been shown to be significantly less than the cost of out-of-home care. Some estimates show it to be as much as 40 times less than the cost to care for a child in out-of-home care for one year,⁷⁹ and in-home services are shown to successfully prevent child abuse and neglect in up to 98 percent of cases.⁸⁰

At the back end of the system, many states have expanded their behavioral health child welfare services and Florida can certainly do the same, but the state must ensure that vulnerable subpopulations of youth also have additional supports in place. Crossover youth, for example, are often not identified early enough to prepare for their needs. Nearly half the country has implemented programs that cater to the needs of these children and adolescents that have resulted in improved outcomes. **New York, California, Texas, and 17 other states⁸¹** have localities that have implemented the Crossover Youth Practice model, which identifies crossover youth in order to provide targeted services to “help them get their lives moving in a positive direction.”⁸² Florida is included in this group, but has only implemented the program in 7 cities and counties throughout the state.⁸³

71 Currently in 531.982 and 531.287, Texas Government Code

72 “Bullock launches ‘Protect Montana Kids’ Initiative.” (Sep. 21, 2015). MTN News.

73 “FAIR (Family Assessment and Intervention Response).” (accessed September 2015). Children and Families First.

74 “Family Assessment Response.” (accessed September 2015). Minnesota Department of Human Services.

75 “Washington child protective services tests new FAR approach in Spokane.” (Jan. 8, 2014). Andy Hatch, The Spokesman-Review.

76 “Family Assessment Response.” (accessed September 2015). New York State Office of Children and Family Services.

77 “Family Assessment Response (FAR).” (accessed September 2015). The California Evidence-Based Clearinghouse for Child Welfare.

78 “Washington child protective services tests new FAR approach in Spokane.” (Jan. 8, 2014). Andy Hatch, The Spokesman-Review.

79 Taxpayers could pay up to \$70,000 per year to provide care for a neglected child compared to just over \$1,600 per year for preventative in-home services. Source: “Home Visiting: A proven model to benefit families and save taxpayer dollars!” Florida State University Center for Prevention and Early Intervention Policy.

80 Home Visiting: A proven model to benefit families and save taxpayer dollars!” Florida State University Center for Prevention and Early Intervention Policy.

81 “Introduction to the NYC Crossover Youth Practice Model.” (June 23, 2014). The Center for Juvenile Justice Reform and Casey Family Programs.

82 “Mahoning County Juvenile Justice Officials Lend a Hand to Judges in Indiana.” (Oct. 15, 2015). Sherry Karabin, Akron Legal News.

83 Including Bartow, Brevard County, Duval County, Ft. Lauderdale, Miami-Dade, Seminole, and Volusia County. Source: “Introduction to the NYC Crossover Youth Practice Model.” (June 23, 2014). The Center for Juvenile Justice Reform and Casey Family Programs.

Providing essential services to youth at all levels of the system and from all backgrounds, especially those with complex problems, decreases the likelihood that they will end up in child welfare or other costly state systems, like juvenile and criminal justice systems, later on in life. Additionally, an expanded array of services would allow case managers greater flexibility in deciding which services best meet the needs of the families they serve, which may reduce stress and help decrease turnover.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Like most problems, the issues facing Florida's community-based child welfare system will only grow worse with time if not addressed. Without adequate investments to improve service and workforce issues now, demand on the child welfare system will continue to climb, and children in the system will pay the price for years to come.

Increased services and improved workforce stability promote child safety and improve child permanency outcomes while also reducing the number of children in the child welfare system and lightening the fiscal burden on taxpayers.⁸⁴ Depending on the scope and quality of programs and practices, expansion of the state's child welfare services array and greater workforce stability can save the state hundreds of millions of dollars each year.

To continue improving the child welfare system while maintaining child safety, Florida TaxWatch recommends that Florida:

- Implement services that improve accessibility and availability of child welfare services at all stages of the system, with an emphasis on prevention services that serve at-risk families in their homes and that give case managers more flexibility to serve the families with which they interact.
- Initiate programs that stabilize and provide opportunities to grow the child welfare workforce, particularly programs that provide early educational opportunities for exposure to the field and help case managers cope with workplace stressors.

These solutions have the potential to alleviate caseloads and stress for employees in child welfare as well as improve outcomes for Florida's most vulnerable children, but they cannot come to fruition without state investment. Higher levels of stable, recurring resources for child welfare in Florida would improve the system's services array as well as bolster and expand the work force. This will result in shorter stays in the system and better permanency outcomes for child welfare-involved youth, as well as reduced caseloads and turnover among case managers, ensuring the mutual success of the child welfare system in general as well as the children it serves.

84 "Florida Child Welfare Services Gap Analysis Report." (2014). University of South Florida (USF) Center for Child Welfare.

ABOUT FLORIDA TAXWATCH

As an independent, nonpartisan, nonprofit taxpayer research institute and government watchdog, it is the mission of Florida TaxWatch to provide the citizens of Florida and public officials with high quality, independent research and analysis of issues related to state and local government taxation, expenditures, policies, and programs. Florida TaxWatch works to improve the productivity and accountability of Florida government. Its research recommends productivity enhancements and explains the statewide impact of fiscal and economic policies and practices on citizens and businesses.

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