

Child Welfare Advocacy Coalition

The Child Welfare Advocacy Coalition (CWAC) brings together over 100 organizations and individuals from across Washington state in order to present a unified voice for child welfare system reform to the state Legislature and executive branch.

Our Approach

We promote legislative solutions that are rooted in community expertise, correct long-standing racist policies and practices, and tackle one of these key areas:

- **Prevent** children & families from entering out-of-home care
- **Improve** the child welfare system for children & families in out-of-home care
- **Permanency** for children in out-of-home care
- **Successful Transitions** out of foster care and into adulthood

2021 Priority Legislative Agenda

Keeping Families Together (HB 1227, Rep. Ortiz-Self)

Address racist policy and practices in the child welfare system by modifying aspects of the dependency process that will help prevent children, especially Black, Brown, Indigenous, and other children of color, from being removed from their families, culture, and communities.

Legal Representation for Children & Youth in Foster Care (HB 1219, Rep. Frame)

Phase in the appointment of well-trained, standards-based children's attorneys over six years. Attorneys for children and youth shorten time spent in foster care and can improve outcomes.

Addressing Gaps for Native American Children & Youth

Native American children and youth are more likely to experience foster care and homelessness than non-Native children, and face gaps in services. Through a government-to-government process that involves young people, identify these gaps and propose recommendations to close them.

School Point of Contact for Children & Youth in Foster Care (SB 5184, Sen. Nobles)

Requires public school districts to establish a point of contact in each elementary, middle and high school building to collaborate with district foster care liaisons and coordinate services and resources for students in foster care.

Family Resource Centers (FRC) (HB 1237, Rep. Eslick)

Establish a common set of FRC principles/definition, grounded in the philosophy that by engaging families early, and offering needed services and supports, preventive services ultimately strengthen families and communities and reduce the number of children entering child welfare.

Transitions out of Foster Care

Too many youth exit foster care and other state systems without the resources and skills needed to thrive independently. This reality is magnified due to the COVID pandemic. Fund & implement a youth-centered transition planning process and provide resources directly to young people in need.

Family Time/Parent Child Visitation (HB 1194, Rep. Ortiz-Self)

Visits generally start out as supervised or monitored. DCYF would now need to demonstrate, at the various court proceedings, that continued supervision/monitoring is necessary. Absent justification, the presumption would be that supervision/monitoring is no longer necessary.

Early Childhood Court Programs

Create statewide standards for early childhood court programs, to ensure the quality, accountability, and fidelity to research-based interventions of these programs and promote equitable access, especially among children and families of color.

If you have questions or comments, please contact:

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2021 Budget Priorities

We believe in strengthening families and providing the highest care and services for children, youth and families involved with the child welfare and other systems. CWAC supports equitable tax reform and progressive revenue options to replace the regressive taxes that place a disproportionate burden on low- and middle-income families. We encourage the legislature and the Governor to make bold investments to reform foster care and build an anti-racist child welfare system.

Child Placing Agencies (CPA) Rate Restoration: Restore the badly-needed stabilizing 7.5% rate increase for Child Placing Agencies (CPAs) that was included in the supplemental budget but was vetoed by the Governor due to Covid. CPAs have not regained the rate cuts that they took during the last recession and are continuing to provide vital services for parents and families as foster parents and children in care experience unprecedented strain during the pandemic. (\$591,000)

In-home Services travel rate: Maintain the travel reimbursement rate for in-home service providers the legislature funded in the supplemental budget. Family Preservation and Support Services allow more families to receive in-home services and prevent children from entering foster care. This impacts both rural & urban families, and helps ensure DCYF is able to comply with FFPSA and other federal requirements. (\$2.3m)

Home Visiting: Increase investments in voluntary home visiting so trained home visitors and parents can continue to work together to strengthen and support families in a child's first years of life. This service has continued throughout Covid and has been shown to be particularly helpful as families face economic challenges and isolation. (\$5.6m)

Washington Permanency Initiative: Invest and expand in the Washington Permanency Initiative (WPI), formally Wendy's Wonderful Kids (WWK) adoption recruitment model. A research-based & child-focused recruitment model designed to ensure permanency for children who are at risk of aging out of foster care by focusing on keeping youth with relatives or people they know. (\$1.2m)

LifeSet: Restore critical services for transition-age youth facing challenges that have been compounded by the COVID-19 crisis by funding the LifeSet program in King County in FY22 and expanding to Eastern Washington FY23. This funding was included in the 2020 Supplemental Budget, but was vetoed due to COVID-19 budget constraints. (\$1.1m)

Arlington Drive: Arlington Drive opened in 2020 with a 12 bed emergency shelter for minors and 58 unit apartment building for young adults. The 2020 legislature appropriated funds for 9 months of operation; the project needs the 2021-23 budget to continue funding at that same rate for the full biennium. (\$4.25m)

Early Learning Engagement Navigators: Early Learning Engagement Navigators will assist child welfare-involved families to engage in early learning and other services in 23 geographic areas around the state with historically high rates of child abuse and neglect investigations. (\$3.9m)

Anchor Community Initiative (ACI): Expand the successful ACI that in partnership with the Office of Homeless Youth is building a statewide system to prevent and end youth and young adult homelessness. (\$4m)

Educational Equity: Expand Treehouse's Graduation Success to an additional 300 youth in foster care, providing the comprehensive supports they need to complete high school. (\$2m)

College and Career: Increase funding for Passport to Careers to ensure all eligible foster and unaccompanied homeless youth have access to higher education and apprenticeships. (\$8.4m, Workforce Education Investment Account)

Family Connections Program (FCP): Restore funding to implement the FCP that was created through statute in 2020. The Program focuses on developing relationships between caregivers and parents, as studies show such connections result in children returning home more quickly and more timely permanency. (\$998k GFS \$310k GFF)

Concrete Goods: Funding to meet immediate needs of families at risk of entering the child welfare system, to be distributed via contracted providers. (\$2.3m)

Enhanced Behavioral Health Supports: Sustain funding for behavioral health services in emergency shelters serving youth ages 12-17, ensuring shelters can be a safe, supportive place for youth in crisis. (\$800k)

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2021 Support Priorities

- Funding to support the continuation of the Poverty Reduction Workgroup Steering Committee
- Recommendations from the Children & Youth Behavioral Health Workgroup
- Families First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) spending authority
- Child specific licenses (SB 5151, Sen. Wilson)
- Funding for the Housing Trust Fund
- Housing/services for child welfare involved parents with Substance Use Disorder (and their children): Establish housing options that prevent family separation, keep children out of foster care, and provide effective behavioral health and other critical services.

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