

FOSTER CARE PREVENTION

In her FY 2021 budget proposal, the governor recommended investment in programming to prevent some of Michigan's most vulnerable residents — our children — from entering foster care.

BACKGROUND

Children are safe — psychologically, physically, and emotionally — when they live in families in their own communities. Separation from families is traumatic even when necessary, and— foster care should be used as a last resort. When placement in foster care is necessary, it should be temporary and in the most family-like setting possible. Lengthy placements in group care can also lead to poor outcomes for children and families.[1] In order to better protect our children we must ensure that at-risk families are connected to evidence based prevention and early intervention services.

Of the 190,000 calls received by the abuse and neglect hotline in 2019, approximately 10% of the calls were substantiated for child abuse or neglect. Most children enter care for child neglect; unmet mental health, parental substance use disorders, and poverty drive these entries.

As a condition to receiving federal funds to expand prevention services, states must implement additional procedures for assuring children who enter foster care are placed in family homes unless certain criteria are met for more restrictive placement. In order to access federal funds, states may no longer place children in group care unless it is deemed necessary and appropriate for the child's individual needs. Federal law will require MDHHS to provide additional support to children and caregivers to address the complex needs of children who have experienced trauma and avoid placement in group care.

PROPOSED ACTION

The governor's recommendation builds from federal funding made available under the Family First Prevention Services Act to ensure Michigan meets the requirements of the new federal law. It also includes a trauma-focused cognitive behavioral therapy pilot intended to decrease congregate care.

Funding will be used on evidence-based programs and resources that have been successful in other states and approved by the federal government. These will be aimed at reducing trauma for vulnerable children and families by:

- Keeping children safe with their families by providing programs and services — from trauma screenings to substance use or mental health treatment and in-home coaching — that identify and address the challenges that sometimes lead to child abuse and neglect.
- Placing children in the most family-like setting when placement in care is necessary and ensuring children can leave foster care to a permanent family as quickly as safely possible.

The investment will create a more stable experience for children long term. It will also generate savings because fewer children will enter the foster care system and fewer children in care would spend time in costly group care settings.

TOTAL EXECUTIVE OFFICE RECOMMENDATION

This recommendation is at no new cost to the state.

[1] Casey Family Programs, 2017, <https://www.casey.org/what-are-the-outcomes-for-youth-placed-in-congregate-care-settings>.