

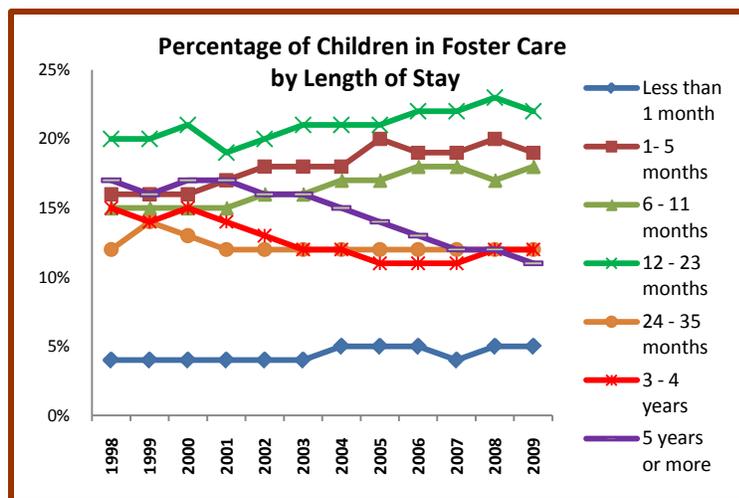
REDUCING FOSTER CARE SAFELY SAVES PUBLIC DOLLARS AND PROMOTES FAMILY STABILITY

In difficult economic times, elected officials need reliable, cost-effective approaches that improve the lives of children and families. Outlined below are several budget-conscious solutions that improve outcomes for children in foster care and strengthen their families.

Child welfare systems provide critical assistance to children and families. Yet the [outcomes](#) for too many children and families are poor and the costs strain state budgets. In 2007 child welfare services cost the United States [over \\$25 billion](#). State policymakers have important opportunities to improve these services and hold public and private agencies more accountable for achieving results. Key goals are to prevent entry into care and ensure that children served by the system move out of care to their own families or other permanent homes as quickly as is safely possible. The [risks](#) to youth who remain in foster care include failure to complete high school, mental health problems and pregnancy. Teen girls in foster care are [2.5 times more likely](#) to become

pregnant by age 19 than those not in foster care. Teen childbearing was estimated to cost the child welfare system over \$2.3 billion nationally in 2004 alone (the most recently available data).

The longer children [stay in foster care](#), the less likely they are to successfully reunify with their families, the higher the risk to their health and well-being and the more likely they are to “age out”. [Youth who “age out”](#), or leave foster care at age 18 with no permanent home or family, face mental health disorders, unemployment, homelessness and other difficulties. Policies that



address critical barriers to placing children with families and that serve the needs of children in foster care result in stronger families and youth who are better prepared to succeed in life while also reducing state expenditures.

Responsible, Budget Conscious Policies

- **Require Child Welfare and Housing Agencies to Partner in Accessing Federal Funding to Reunify Families.** The [Family Unification Program \(FUP\)](#) provides Section 8 rental assistance to income-qualified families to reunify children in foster care with families for whom the lack of adequate housing is a primary factor in the separation; it also grants housing choice vouchers to youth 18 to 21 years old who left foster care at age 16 or older and lack adequate housing. By bundling Family Unification Program vouchers with additional state and federal dollars, [Connecticut](#) has prevented homelessness and kept children out of the child welfare system. Supplementing 500 vouchers with \$6 million in state case management costs saved the state \$21 million in foster care and homelessness-related expenses. Since the program began, 455 families have been housed and over 1,130 children remained or were reunified with their families.
- **Establish a Guardianship Subsidy Equal to Foster Care.** Evaluation of a federal waiver used by [Illinois](#) to demonstrate the effectiveness of subsidized guardianship showed that after ten years the program reduced the average length of stay in foster care by 269 days per child. The state [saved \\$2,294 per child](#) in administrative, resulting in \$90 million available to reinvest in child welfare services and improvements. In [Tennessee](#), children reunified with their parents more quickly when subsidized

guardianship was made available to relatives. The federal Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act ([Fostering Connections](#)) now allows states to use federal Title IV-E dollars for subsidies to families who assume guardianship of children in foster care. [California](#) recently enhanced its Kinship Guardianship Assistance Payment (Kin-GAP) subsidy to benefit children living with guardians; the subsidy is 100% of the basic foster care rate.

- **Require that Caregivers are Informed about Placement and Guardianship.** Children placed with relatives [experience](#) greater stability in placements and education, greater academic success and fewer behavior problems. Fostering Connections now requires states to identify and provide notice to all adult relatives within 30 days after a child has been placed in foster care. Notice includes informing relatives about their options to participate in decisions, how to become a foster family and the availability of additional services and supports. The [Connecticut](#) statute requires the dissemination of information about subsidized guardianship to all prospective guardians. In [Washington State](#), a law requiring efforts to locate relatives doubled the number of children in relative placements over two years (from 19 percent to 37 percent).
- **Waive Non-Safety Licensing Standards for Relatives.** The licensing of relatives as foster parents is directly connected to eligibility for federal funding for either subsidized guardianship or foster care placement. In order to support relatives to become licensed, states can [waive licensing provisions](#) which are not essential for the child's safety or allow relatives to develop an alternative to the non-safety issues identified, such as using bottled water when the tap water is not potable. [Connecticut](#), [Idaho](#) and [Missouri](#) legislatively established general waiver provisions that can be applied on a case-by-case basis. [Massachusetts](#) and [Kentucky](#) provide waivers for specific issues such as square footage per occupant or sleeping arrangements.
- **Require Staff and Foster Parent Training on Teen Pregnancy Issues.** With support from the federal Centers for Disease Control (CDC), [Virginia](#) formed a three-year partnership with state and municipal departments of health and social services to encourage healthy sexual behaviors and prevent teen pregnancies among youth in, or transitioning out of, the foster care system. Strategies included training for social workers and group home directors and offering workshops for foster parents. Virginia and Oklahoma are both piloting the only teen pregnancy, STD, HIV prevention curriculum created specifically for foster youth in group homes. [Massachusetts](#) funds outreach efforts to youth in foster care and training for parents and staff. New federal funding supports state teen pregnancy prevention efforts such as: the [Pregnancy Assistance Fund](#), Personal [Responsibility Education Program](#) and [Abstinence Education](#) Grant Program.
- **Require Child Welfare and Education Agencies to Jointly Promote Educational Stability.** Youth in foster care [experience](#) five or more school changes on average, which results in increased risks of behavior problems, academic failure and high school drop-out (less than 60 percent finish high school). Fostering Connections [requires](#) child welfare agencies to work with the educational agencies to maintain children in their home schools and, if change is necessary, requires immediate enrollment in a new school and immediate availability of records. It also provides federal funding to assist with transportation. [Oregon](#) law mandates foster placements near home schools and included funding for transportation. [California](#) established comprehensive educational rights for children in foster care that includes the right to remain in the same school; transportation to ensure that students are able to stay at the school; transfer of the students' educational records within two days; immediate enrollment in a transfer school; and, a liaison to oversee placement and transfer. The California Foster Youth Services Program has [preliminary results](#) showing academic improvement, reduced expulsions and improved attendance.

Visit policyforresults.org for assistance, more information, state data, research and resources. Policyforresults.org is a non-partisan, nonprofit resource for state policymakers.