

The Child Welfare Workforce Support Act

Investing in the development of a robust and well-trained child welfare workforce is central to improving outcomes for children and families across the United States. The existence of such a workforce is essential to a child welfare agency's ability to carry out the responsibilities with which they have been entrusted. Child welfare work has been shown to be physically and emotionally challenging, as demonstrated by recent studies into the impact of secondary traumatic stress (STS) on child welfare professionals.¹ The multitude of challenges inherent in child welfare work, combined with relatively low compensation and work benefits, make these careers difficult to sustain, resulting in high rates of turnover.

Studies conducted over the last 15 years estimate the national rate of turnover of child welfare workers to be 20-40 percent annually.^{2 3} In 2017, Virginia reported a turnover rate of 30%, while Washington state reported a turnover rate of 20%, and Georgia reported a turnover rate of 32%.⁴ These high rates of turnover detract from the quality of services delivered to children and families and result in an estimated cost of \$54,000 per worker leaving an agency.⁵

Greater action is needed to ensure that individuals pursuing child welfare careers receive appropriate training and support to improve the sustainability of their important yet demanding work. Higher retention rates for child welfare workers translates to greater stability for families and improved services for vulnerable youth. Existing research provides a number of evidence-based and promising practices for improving recruitment and retention in the child welfare workforce.

The Child Welfare Workforce Support Act would:

- Direct the Secretary of Health and Human Services to conduct a five-year demonstration program prioritizing eligible entities such as states, localities, nonprofits, or tribes with a demonstrated high turnover rate of child welfare workers
- Provide up to \$100,000 annually for up to five years for child welfare service providers to implement targeted interventions to recruit, select, and retain child welfare workers
- Focus on building best practices for:
 - Reducing barriers to recruitment, development, and retention of child welfare workers
 - Better supporting the child welfare workforce and their efforts to better meet the unique needs of infants and children
 - Providing ongoing professional development opportunities and support, including addressing secondary trauma, to improve the retention of child welfare workers
- Require programs to be monitored and evaluated by the Department of Health and Human Services and issue a report on outcomes from the demonstration programs

¹ https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources/fact-sheet/addressing_sts_among_child_welfare_staff_a_practice_brief.pdf

² U.S. Government Accountability Office. (2003). HHS could play a greater role in helping child welfare agencies recruit and retain staff (GAO-03-357). Retrieved from <http://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-03-357>

³ National Child Welfare Workforce Institute. (2011). Child welfare workforce demographics (2000–2010): Snapshot of the frontline child welfare caseworker. Retrieved from http://ncwwi.org/files/Workforce_Demographic_Trends_May2011.pdf

⁴ https://caseyfamilypro-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/media/HO_Turnover-Costs_and_Retention_Strategies-1.pdf

⁵ Blome, W. W., & Steib, S. D. (2014). The organizational structure of child welfare: Staff are working hard, but it is hardly working. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 44, 181–188.