

Promoting Safe and Stable Families Program

ACTION

- Increase funding to \$505 million for FY 2005 for the Promoting Safe and Stable Families (PSSF) program (Title IV-B, Subpart 2, of the Social Security Act).

HISTORY

PSSF is one of the single largest flexible federal funding sources for prevention and support services in child welfare. Changes to the program may be considered as part of any comprehensive child welfare financing reform Congress considers in 2005.

PSSF funding supports an array of support services for families with children and is one of the few sources of federal funds for services to prevent and remedy the difficulties that bring families to the attention of the child welfare system.

Congress reauthorized PSSF in 2002 and created two separate funding categories. States currently receive \$305 million in mandatory (guaranteed) funds—the same funding level as in FY 2001. Congress also created an authorization of \$200 million in discretionary funds annually, meaning that total PSSF funding could reach \$505 million in a year. Congress must approve the additional \$200 million each year. Since 2002, PSSF has never been fully funded; combined mandatory and discretionary funding totaled \$403 million for FY 2005.

From the annual mandatory funds, \$6 million is provided for research, evaluation, and technical assistance to identify and build on programs that work. New research and evaluation priorities include reunification and postadoption service models, outcomes of adoptions finalized after enactment of the Adoption and Safe Families Act, programs that address parental substance abuse, and approaches that target specific needs and age groups.

The State Court Improvement Program receives \$10 million per year. One percent of total mandatory funding is reserved for tribal governments. In addition to mandatory funding, 3.3% of any discretionary funds provided each year for PSSF is dedicated to research, training, and evaluation; another 3.3% is available for state court improvement programs, and 2% is reserved for tribal governments.

Before 1997, at least 90% of PSSF funds had to be used for family preservation and community-based family support services. When the program was reauthorized in 1997, two additional categories of service were added: time-limited reunification services and adoption promotion and support services.

The statute does not specify a percentage or minimum amount of funds that must be used for any single category of service. Program guidance to states from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, however, states that allocations of less than 20% to each of the four services requires a strong rationale. Funds are allocated to states according to their relative shares of children receiving food stamps. The state must match funding at 25%, meaning that a state provides one dollar for every three federal dollars.

Family preservation services are comprehensive, short-term, intensive services for families delivered primarily in the home and designed to prevent the unnecessary out-of-home placement of children or to promote family reunification. They are services for children and families designed to help families (including adoptive and extended families) at risk or in crisis. The services are intended to protect a child in a home where allegations of child abuse or neglect have occurred, prevent subsequent abuse or neglect, prevent unnecessary placement, or reduce a child's stay in out-of-home care.

Families in need of family preservation services are usually referred by public child welfare agencies. Services are provided within 24 hours of referral, and the family's involvement is voluntary. These services, including counseling, budgeting, nutrition, and parenting skills, provide a holistic response to families 24 hours a day.

Family support services were developed to respond to the concerns, interests, and needs of families within a community. These preventive community-based services are designed to promote the well-being of children and families, increase the strength and stability of families (including adoptive, foster, and extended families), increase parents' confidence and competence in their parenting abilities, afford children a stable and supportive family environment, and otherwise enhance child development.

Family support services are targeted to families within a community with potential difficulties and concerns related to the proper functioning of the family and care of the children. The services address the need to improve child well-being, family functioning, and parents' ability to provide for their families, before they are in crisis.

To reach families in need of assistance, family support programs work with outside community organizations such as schools, Head Start programs, and child welfare agencies. The aim is to provide temporary relief to families by teaching them how to better nurture their children. Involvement in these services is voluntary. Types of services include parent education, child care relief, and self-help groups.

Time-limited reunification services address the needs of children and families involved in the foster care system. Services are provided within 15 months of when a child enters foster care. Reunification services for the child and family include counseling, substance abuse treatment, mental health services, assistance to address domestic violence issues, temporary child care, and transportation assistance.

Adoption services provided with PSSF funds are aimed at encouraging an increase in the adoption of children from foster care. These services can be used to help children and families prepare for adoption and address their post-adoption needs. The statute specifically highlights the growing need for post-adoption services.

KEY FACTS

- In 2002, an estimated 3,193,000 children were reported and referred for investigation to state and local child protection service agencies because family members, professionals, or other citizens were concerned about their safety and well-being. After follow-up assessments, officials were able to substantiate 896,000 of these cases.
- In 2002, an estimated 526,000 child victims received post-investigation services; an additional estimated 708,000 children who were subjects of unsubstantiated reports also received postinvestigation services.
- In 2001, 542,000 children were in foster care, 290,000 children entered foster care, and 263,000 exited foster care.
- In 2001, of the 542,000 children in care, 241,051 had a goal of being reunified with a parent or principle caregiver; 148,606 children exited foster care and were reunited with a parent or caregiver.
- In 2002, of the 532,000 children in foster care, 129,000 were free for adoption. The number of children adopted from foster care has increased in recent years:
 - 28,000 in 1996
 - 31,000 in 1997
 - 37,000 in 1998
 - 46,000 in 1999
 - 51,000 in 2000
 - 50,000 in 2001
 - 52,000 in 2002.

Sources for statistical information are provided in the online version of this fact sheet. See www.cwla.org/advocacy/2005legagenda.htm.

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