

# Getting to Good Policy Decisions

## How Can Policy and Practice Best Support the Most Vulnerable Children, Youth and Families

IPPSR Public Policy Forum

May 2, 2018



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in the best interest  
of children.*

# Who We Are

- A statewide, independent policy voice for children, youth and their families.
- We want Michigan's public policy and programs to help children, youth and families access the opportunities they need to succeed.
- To make that happen, we work to ensure that policymakers prioritize the needs of children, youth and families facing the most challenges.
- We believe that better public policy is built when those directly impacted by it are engaged with decision makers.



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# Why Do We Need to Improve Policy In This Area?

- Predictably Poor Outcomes for Kids, Youth and Families Involved in the System
- Over-Representation of Children of Color in the System
- **Unique Public Responsibility for Children and Youth in the System**

# Under-Resourced System

- Three of Every Four Dollars in MDHHS Federal
- Virtually All Child Welfare and Foster Care Driven Federally, **Only Required State Investment**
- Positive Practices Remain “Pilots” or Not Available Statewide
- Privatization Contributes to **Inequities in Services**
- **Support Services** Required Also Under-Resourced

# Funding Choices

## Family Preservation/Prevention Services Expenditures

By FY 2000-01 budget, most GF/GP was removed from program. Merit Award Trust Funds were appropriated in FY 2007-08 to better position the state to draw down additional TANF contingency funds. Most federal funding in this area is TANF block grant.



House Fiscal Agency: December 2015

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# Policy Made In Points of Crisis

- Publicized **Tragedies**
  - Creates Worst-Case Scenario Narrative
- Court Involvement
  - Michigan's Foster Care System Sued in 2006
  - Required Spending in Certain Areas
  - Latest Agreement 2/16 Considered an "Exit Plan"
  - Created Some Transparency/Available Information
  - **Contributed to Winners and Losers**
- Current Sexual Abuse Situation
  - Reactive Policy



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Information  
+ Research/Evidence  
+ Lived Experience

= Good Public Policy Investment and Strategy



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# What Information We Need?

- LOTS of Information Available
- Lots of Great Research and Evidence
- Real Question: Do Policymaker Have Access to **The Right Information** to Help Them Make The Best Decisions?
  - Who Comes Into the System? Why?
  - How Are They Doing Under Our Care?
  - Are They Better Prepared When They Leave?

# Keeping Families Out of the System: Stability

- We Know A Lot About What **Stabilizes Families**
- And What **Destabilizes** Them
  - Domestic Violence
  - Substance Use/Misuse
  - Mental Health Challenges
  - Lack of Parenting Knowledge and Skill
  - Lack of Connection to Supports
- Not Having Enough Resources for Basic Needs or the Skills to Get Them
  - Unstable Housing
  - Limited Education and Workforce Success

# ACEs and Child Welfare

- Abuse and Neglect ARE ACEs and Trauma
- Most other measured **ACEs are contributors** to families entering into the system.
- Growing recognition that **trauma and stress change our biology** – change our brain function
  - Adversity can cause traumatic stress
  - Stress changes the brain, making it difficult for kids to pay attention and engage
  - Often results in fight, flight or freeze responses
  - Over time leads to problems in school and health problems

# Assessing and Serving Families: Protecting Children in Michigan

- A Complaint is Made
  - Mandated Reporters and Others
  - Centralized Intake System
- For Some Families, There is An Investigation
  - Almost 250,000 Children in These Families
  - This is Growing
- Investigations Have Five Possible Outcomes
  - Assess Risk and Prescribe Services
  - Nearly 40,000 Confirmed Victims Annually
  - Vast Majority Confirmed for Neglect

# Removing Children From Home

- Result of a Substantiated Investigation AND
- A Court Order
- Determination of **Imminent Risk of Harm**
- DHHS Becomes the Responsible Caretaker
- We Remove About 7,000 Kids a Year
- Foster Care Considered a Short-Term Solution Leading to Permanent Placements
  - Back Home (Reunification)
  - Relatives (Kinship Care)
  - Adoption

# What Do Kids in Care Need?

- Supportive **Caregivers**
  - Connections To Birth Families
  - Preference of Family Placements
  - Trained in Trauma; Supported
- Consistent Placements
- Normal Environments
- Timely **Services**
  - More Complex Needs
  - Often Dependent On Other Under-Resourced Systems
    - Early On
    - Child Care
    - Mental Health Services
  - Dependent on Many Systems Working Well Together
    - Health, Education, Workforce

# What Do Kids Need To Succeed Into Adulthood: Transition

- Kids Leave Foster Care For Three Reasons
  - Reunification
  - Adoption
  - Aging Out of Care
- As They Leave, **What Do They Need?**
  - Connections and Skills
  - Time To Build Those Things
- Option to **Extend Foster Care Benefits** to Age 23; Educational and Medical Services to Age 26
- Expanded Services as Opt-In
  - Young People Leave Traditional Foster Care at 18
  - RE-Apply for Youth Voluntary Foster Care (YVFC)

# Where Does This Lead Us For Policy Recommendations?

- To Keep Families Out of the System
- To Better Serve Children, Youth and Their Caregivers In Foster Care
- To Better Prepare Young People For Life Success
- Need for **State Investments** – Current Budget Decisions
- Need for **Policy Change**



# Prevention Policy Needed

- Invest in Practices That **Address What Destabilizes Families**
  - Researched Strategies for Family Support
  - Based In Community Priorities and Needs
- Improve Access To Supports that **Stabilize Work and School**
  - Child Care
  - Transportation
- Improve Access to Services That Keep **Young People Moving On Positive Paths** Before They Become Parents
  - Mental Health, Substance Use, Targeted Educational Support

# Foster Care Policy Implications

- Training and Support for Caregivers – Including Formal and Informal Kin
- Use of **Child Care Subsidy** to Better Serve Families in Care
- Expand Early On for Consistent Access Statewide
- Timely, Appropriate **Access to Behavioral Health Services**
- **Improving Trauma Informed Practice** in All Systems
- Targeted Education System Resources
  - For Identification, Assessment and Services
  - Help to Catch Up and Inspire Success

# Children's Assurance of Quality Foster Care Act, House Bills 5121-5123

- Puts Into State Law Current Federal Requirements and DHHS Policy
  - **Service Access**
    - Timeliness of Service
    - System of Complaints
- Recommended Expansions
  - Better Definitions of Timeliness
  - Onus of Responsibility for Complaints
  - Placement of Monitoring
- **Supported By Youth in Care and Caregivers**
- Must Pass the Senate in 2018

# Transition Policy Implications

- **Continue Foster Care Services** As Opt Out vs. Opt In
  - Maintain Physical and Mental Health Coverage
  - **Maintain Basic Needs Supports**
- Build Universal High School Diploma Success
  - Regardless of Time
  - Supporting Alternative and Adult Education
- Build **Supports and Skills** Through MYOI
- Increase Investments in Post-Secondary and Workforce Options
  - Don't Base Service Availability on Time or Age
  - Base On Skill Building and Successful Outcomes
- Improve the Tax System to Support
  - Lower the Age of the EITC
  - Incentivize Employers Through Tax Breaks

We **Can** Do Better

We **Must** Do Better

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