

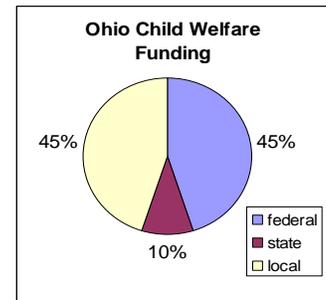


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US Senate Finance Committee Testimony Innovations in Child Welfare Waivers: Starting the Path to Reform March 10, 2011

Good morning Chairman Baucus, Ranking Member Hatch and other members of the US Senate Finance Committee. It is an honor to be here to talk with you today about innovations in child welfare, using flexible Title IV-E waiver funding. My name is Crystal Ward Allen, I am the Executive Director for Public Children Services Association of Ohio – a non profit membership organization serving Ohio’s 88 county public child welfare agencies through support of program excellence and sound public policy for safe children, stable families and supportive communities. PCSAO is also Project Manager for Ohio’s *Fostering Connections Kinship Navigator Grant*.

Ohio is only one of thirteen state supervised, county administered child welfare systems in the nation, and our funding system is heavily dependent upon local and federal investment. We are very proud to be fiscally accountable – depending upon the generosity of local taxpayers every few years, and ***Ohio recently earned a 96+% compliance rate on our federal Title IV-E eligibility review.***



Ohio has enjoyed a Title IV-E Budget Neutral Flexible Funding Waiver since 1997, and we anticipate a five year renewal. 18 counties – a mixture of metro, suburban and rural communities and constituting one-third of Ohio’s population – participate in the waiver. These counties often lead the way with innovations, allowing other counties in Ohio to replicate their successes. As you can see

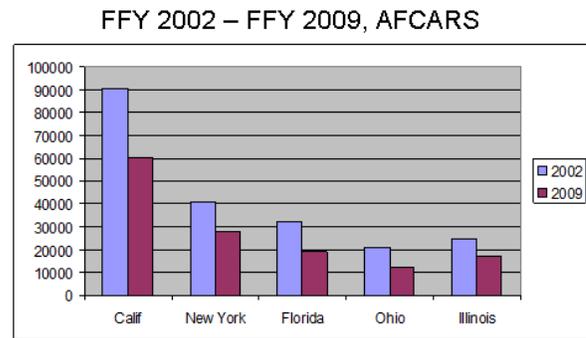


from the Supreme Court of Ohio’s Court Improvement Program chart to the left, Ohio has made a steady, intentional safe reduction in child placements, between January 2002 and January 2010. See more at <http://www.summitonchildren.ohio.gov/AttySvcs/cfsr>.

The flexible federal funds have been essential in our Safe Reduction of Children in Foster/Group Care by Strengthening Families – rather than be restricted in investing our Title IV-E funds only for placement costs – a critical resource for child safety, but only half the job – our waiver allows investment in the whole continuum of child welfare services: community based prevention services, family strengthening diversion and safety

planning services, support of relatives and other kin, enhancing the quality of services for children and youth in care, and targeted and aggressive reunification services and post placement services.

I'd like to take a moment to provide a bit of data regarding improved outcomes. You can see from this AFCARS chart, federal data showing high performing states that have safely reduced the number of children experiencing the trauma of foster care. **Four of the five high performing states – California, Florida, Ohio and Illinois – had Title IV-E Waivers.** You can view more at http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/stats_research/index.htm#afcars.



-34% -31% -40% -42% -30%
Safe Reduction in Out of Home Care

Below, you can see Ohio data that shows even when experiencing a 15% increase of reports of child maltreatment – we believe due to the stressed economy – Ohio continues to better serve our children by safely investing in families vs. placement. Not only are we placing fewer children, but they are staying in care for shorter length of stays – with more timely reunifications, permanency with relatives or adoptive families. And safety, as measured by repeat reports of child maltreatment, has not been compromised.

Ohio Statewide Trends	2009	% Change 2001 - 2009
Children in custody at least a day	23,139	34 % decrease
Children in custody at year-end	11,721	42 % decrease
Children awaiting adoption	2,897	46 % decrease
Reports of maltreatment	116,216	15 % increase

Below are a few examples of how the flexible IV-E waiver funding has been invested locally, to improve outcomes for our children and youth:

Franklin County Children Services (Columbus) – a key use of waiver funding has been an increased investment in neighborhood settlement houses that strengthen resource poor communities where our families live. These community centers then offer parent mentors and parenting skills classes, afterschool enrichment programs for students, and access to hard services such as utilities assistance, food pantries, etc. We know foster children return to their families and neighborhoods, and enriching the community will facilitate better outcomes. Franklin County Children Services also created the Education Partnership for Academic Student Success – for middle and high school foster students. Educators, often retired, are hired to meet weekly with students to assist with educational needs including homework skills, transportation, extracurricular activities, etc. They also serve as student advocates and facilitators between the family, school and the child welfare agency. Educational outcomes for the foster youth have improved greatly in terms of attendance, grades and graduation rates.

Lorain County Children Services (NE Ohio) – the philosophical change from rescuing children with placement vs. keeping them safe by investing in families, has had a major impact in local outcomes, as you can see from the chart below. And, they have been excellent performers on the federal Child and Family Service Review (CFSR) “report card”.

Lorain CCS Outcome	1995	2011
% of budget devoted to placement costs	48%	11%
# children in custody	352	90
# children in group/residential	56	22
Average length of stay	53 months	10 months
Children in APPLA (long term foster care)	87	1

Lorain County Children Services is all about safety and quality however, and has greatly focused on improving the care for foster children and youth. When children do need out of home care, the agency invests their funds for quality foster care. Only one child or sibling group is placed with a given foster family – and much support is offered from the agency to that family. They usually have a group of foster families ready and waiting – much like the National Reserves. This greatly enhances the care and outcomes for these foster children.

Richland County Children Services (Mansfield) – Whether developing a Multi-Systemic Therapy program to work with troubled youth and their families in-home, investing in behavioral health assessments and services for families working on reunification, or achieving timely permanence for children when families cannot reunify (Richland CCS received an HHS Excellence in Adoption Award for timely adoptions), this agency is aggressive on behalf of the children it serves. Identifying, supporting and assisting relatives and other kin caregivers, including efforts to secure legal custody or guardianship, is another hallmark of Richland County Children Services. They believe children thrive better with safe familiar families and limited governmental intrusion. Use of the Title IV-E Waiver flexible funding has been invested in a variety of ways, and like Lorain County, Richland County has superb CFSR outcomes. The agency is very externally focused, engaged in partnerships with community service providers, the local YMCA, medical and law enforcement entities to prevent or safely receive abandoned babies, and others to help build awareness and resources in a community ravaged with unemployment.

As the Title IV-E Waiver is designed as an “experiment” to demonstrate whether flexible uses of federal child welfare funds improves outcomes, there are research / evaluation aspects. Ohio’s waiver allows 18 counties to participate in the demonstration and has a group of “like” counties that serve as the control group. Unfortunately, this limits the addition of any counties of size, as it would put an imbalance in the experimental design. Some states, such as California and Florida employ an alternative “time series” evaluation design to measure performance across time.

The evaluation is also set up to contribute to the body of evidence based practice and knowledge. Ohio’s most recent five year evaluation showed very promising information for the practice of **Family Team Meetings** for open cases (not just custody cases), engaging families, caseworkers/supervisors and other involved providers with a trained facilitator to embrace issues and jointly seek solutions. The family engagement seems to improve outcomes with fewer placements and more kin placements when families cannot safely care for their children. This practice will have greater fidelity and higher quality data and evaluation in the next five years. **Enhanced Kinship Supports** was also promising in our recent evaluation, but not well defined, so the Ohio waiver counties will have greater fidelity to a common practice on this topic as well, and improved data collection and evaluation. Rigorous evaluation of these common strategies will further contribute to the body of knowledge for excellent child welfare practice.

While Ohio is pleased to have waiver evaluation data on particular practices, we are clear that flexible financing – like **Ohio’s Title IV-E Waiver – improves child outcomes.** With a well trained workforce, excellent tools such as Ohio’s safety, risk assessment and family planning tool (CAPMIS), and integrated community partnerships, we can better protect children through strengthening families (birth, kin and adoptive), and improve outcomes for those children and youth in, and transitioning out of care.

Thus, I would request that Congress aggressively move to make broad reform in federal child welfare financing. Title IV-E was designed to pay for children in foster and adoptive care. That is what it does, and while foster/group care is necessary in some cases, it should be used less frequently and as a temporary status. Title IV-E should be allowed for the full continuum of care (prevention/diversion services, placement, and reunification/post placement services) - fewer children would end up in foster/group care and fewer would linger in care for long periods of time. Title IV-E is also saddled with antiquated 1996 AFDC income eligibility standards – yes, real income set 15 years ago! It is time to eliminate or update the income standard. All children deserve a federal investment for child protection.

Thank you for hearing about Ohio’s waiver experience. I would be happy to respond to any questions.