Bridging Partisan Divides for Our Children: A National Child Welfare Initiative

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Family Focused Treatment Association 20th Annual Public Policy Institute
May 6, 2024
# Overview of Landscape Assessment

## Scoping Activities

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Details</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Interviews</strong></td>
<td>~100 interviews including those with lived experience (youth, birth parents, foster parents, adoptive parents, caseworkers), agency leaders, policymakers, judicial officials, faith leaders, tribal leaders, researchers &amp; advocates</td>
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<td><strong>Polling</strong></td>
<td>On-line nationally and state-representative (GA and OH) samples</td>
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<td><strong>Small Group Discussions</strong></td>
<td>Alumni of care, birth parents, foster parents, providers, agency leaders, law enforcement, judges</td>
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<td><strong>Legislative Review</strong></td>
<td>Analysis of 557 bills introduced in 50 states over the past two years</td>
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<td><strong>Community Visits</strong></td>
<td>(GA and OH): Interviews and focus groups in Republican and Democratic communities</td>
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<td><strong>Media Scan</strong></td>
<td>Analysis of every public mention of &quot;child welfare&quot; over a 1-year period with a focused review of mentions by public officials/policymakers</td>
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<td><strong>Surveys</strong></td>
<td>Community representatives, caseworkers, foster parents, faith leaders</td>
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Results of Landscape Assessment

1) There is widespread concern that political polarization, while not new, is increasingly affecting discussions and decision-making in child welfare.

2) Polarization is the result of differences in values, not just differences in party affiliation. Even when values overlap, they are often expressed in different/competing ways.

3) There is significant consensus on many of the major challenges child welfare currently faces.

4) There is significant consensus that child welfare systems need to be improved through strengthening implementation of existing policy and targeted new reforms that clarify practice and reduce system burden.
Polarized rhetoric is obscuring opportunities to advance policy solutions to address agreed upon challenges
Significant Consensus on Major Challenges, Needed Reforms

Challenges

• Insufficient workforce capacity and skills
• Severity of youth challenges
• Child welfare backstopping failures of other systems, becoming a catch-all system
• Lack of placement resources (including needed residential), reliance on hoteling/office placements
• Lack of/accessibility of appropriate mental health services to meet heightened demand
• Barriers to Family First implementation
• Inability to meet the needs of youth aging out
• Bureaucratic red tape
• Not fully taking advantage of opportunity to benefit from lived experience

Reforms

• Narrowing the front-door
• Greater involvement of other sectors in addressing families' needs
• Effective Family First Act implementation
• Further scaling up of kin-first approach
• Better aligning financing and accountability with desired outcomes
• Ensuring parents’ rights/legal representation/improving investigation
• Terminating parental rights appropriately
• Attention to and investment in effective, accessible services and supports
Summary of Legislative Review

• Although the vast majority of bills introduced over the past two years were partisan, the two parties share interests, and opportunities for bipartisan agreement exist. These include:
  ➢ Codifying the Indian Child Welfare Act in state policy
  ➢ Improving system oversight
  ➢ Narrowing the definition of neglect
  ➢ Improving the reliability and quality of reporting and investigating
  ➢ Improving prevention and family preservation services
  ➢ Strengthening financial support to kinship and adoptive families
  ➢ Addressing workforce issue

• The level of attention to mandatory reporting suggest overall dissatisfaction with current policy and practice

• Parental rights and protections may be an area where rhetoric overshadows some common ground
Summary of Public Polling

1) Dual Mission Appreciated
2) Neglect and Abuse Seen as Willful
3) Faith in Family Improvement
4) Support for Kinship Care
5) Government and Community Share Responsibility
6) Balancing Act in Child Welfare Decisions
7) Timeline for Reunification
8) Complex Views on Adoption and Cultural Preservation
9) Acknowledgment of Systemic Strains and Bias
10) Fewer differences among subgroups than most would expect
Ongoing Child Welfare Initiative Activities

• Public discussions
• Intensive workgroups
• Ongoing analysis of state legislation
• Policy resource exchange
More Information/Remain Connected

- Main Web Page -- Sign up for Newsletter
- Key Findings from BPC Child Welfare Landscape Assessment
- Bipartisanship Across the Nation: A Review of State Child Welfare Legislation
- Results of Public Polling -- The American Public Weighs in on Our Nation's Child Welfare System
  - Polling Results by Lived Experience: From Judgment to Empathy: Unveiling Truths in Child Welfare
  - Polling Results by Importance of Religion/Spirituality
  - Polling Results by Political Affiliation -- Political Affiliation has Limited Impact on Publics Perceptions of Child Welfare
Thank you!