

# Focus IV-B on Families

Title IV-B of the Social Security Act is a critical child welfare law that provides flexible funding to support thriving families, including prevention of maltreatment, supporting kinship and foster caregivers, and helping reunify families separated by the child welfare system. **Without Congressional action, Title IV-B expires on December 31st .**

Title IV-B is distinctly different yet complementary to Title IV-E of the Social Security Act, which provides resources for foster care placements and prevention of unnecessary foster care. Title IV-B reauthorization offers bipartisan policymakers the opportunity to continue aligning federal child welfare resources with the best outcomes for families, based on research and the insights of individuals who have experienced the child welfare system.

Reforms to the Title IV-B program can play an important role in shaping child welfare policy and services nationwide. Across the following shared priorities, we urge increased Title IV-B investments and a central focus on integrating lived expertise so states can learn from and tailor their programs to those they serve through three specific buckets:

- 1. Fund IV-B for Families** – Title IV-B needs increased funding for families. In 2018, Congress enacted the bipartisan *Family First Prevention Services Act* (“Family First”), which created the Title IV-E Prevention Program. Increased Title IV-B resources complement Family First in keeping children with their families as much as possible.
- 2. Support Families’ Mental Health** – Children thrive when their families thrive. When families encounter the child welfare system, they have already experienced trauma. They often have significant unmet mental health needs. Investments and improvements in Title IV-B will complement ongoing bipartisan mental health efforts and support a trauma-responsive child welfare system.
- 3. Build the Workforce Families Need** – Child welfare reform moves at the speed of its workforce. The child welfare workforce faces unprecedented strain and secondary trauma, and it needs urgent attention and investment to bring innovative solutions to severe workforce shortages. Failing to address workforce challenges puts children and families at risk. We need a Title IV-B that values, supports, and resources child welfare workers to support thriving families.

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ZERO to THREE

We recommend the following policy recommendations in each of these priority areas:

## 1. Fund IV-B for Families

- **Increase investment in family support services to keep families from coming into the child welfare system.** To complement Family First, Title IV-B needs more resources to expand existing IV-B community-based prevention supports that help families upstream before they ever come into contact with the child welfare system.
- **Increase investment in reunification.** Almost half of children in foster care return home to their families. Expand Title IV-B's focus on reunifying families to help them succeed and prevent re-entry into the child welfare system.
- **Strengthen kinship supports.** Expand existing investments to develop and prove the effectiveness of innovative kinship approaches, eliminate barriers to kinship placements, and clarify Title IV-B services can support kinship families.
- **Support foster and adoptive families.** Strengthen kin and non-kin foster parent recruitment and support of foster and adoptive families.
- **Strengthen Tribal child welfare protections.** Strengthen the gold-standard Indian Child Welfare Act to ensure its continued protections for American Indian/Alaska Native children and families. Increase resources to and autonomy for Tribal child welfare services.
- **Reauthorize and expand the Court Improvement Program,** which plays a vital role in ensuring courts connect families to resources that prevent unnecessary foster care.
- **Reauthorize and expand the Regional Partnership Grant program** to allow more jurisdictions to support families who are affected by substance use disorders to prevent placement and reunify parents and their children.

## 2. Support Families' Mental Health

- **Provide funding, training, technical support, and accountability** so states and Tribes improve access to community-based mental health services for youth and families, to address trauma, improve outcomes, and reduce unnecessary institutionalization.
- **Increase investments in child and family well-being.** Many states and Tribes use flexible Title IV-B funds for critical services that address families' trauma and healing needs. This is especially important for families of young children who have experienced trauma during early development.

## 3. Build the Workforce Families Need

- **Fund workforce development.** Give child welfare staff the education, training, and mental health support they need for their complex work supporting children and families.
- **Expand and fund peer support/navigation services,** which engage peer experts who have experienced the child welfare system in supporting other families in the child welfare system.

TAKE ACTION:

**Enact and Fund a Family-Focused IV-B Reauthorization**