



FIX BREAKDOWNS IN THE CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM

The parties agree that additional financial resources will be necessary to comply with some of the provisions of these agreements.

-Braam v. State of Washington, Final Settlement

The realization needs to be out there in the public that once the system is more effective for kids of color, it's more effective for all kids.

-King County Superior Court Judge Patricia Clark
quoted in ColorsNW, January 2006

RECOMMENDATIONS

All children deserve safe and stable home environments. Sadly, though, our state's child welfare system breaks down in caring for abused and neglected children. Our state agency moves foster children far too often, doesn't give children and their foster parents the supports they need and short-shrifts the community-based partners that provide critical services the state doesn't have the capacity to offer. The state's shortcomings are particularly acute as regards children of color, who have disproportionately worse outcomes.

We call on lawmakers to:

- **Adequately fund child welfare improvements resulting from the Braam v. DSHS lawsuit settlement,**
- **Increase the vendor reimbursement rate for child-serving programs by \$5.6 million, and**
- **Act to erase racial disproportionality as well as disparate outcomes for children of color.**

BACKGROUND

Children who have been victimized by abuse or neglect deserve appropriate, timely, and competent services that will help them reach their full potential. Washington's Department of Health and Human Services is falling far short in serving these vulnerable children. The Federal Child and Family Services Review of the state's child welfare system, completed in February 2004, found our state's system lacking by almost every measure. In addition, the state is under court orders to reform foster care, as laid out in the settlement of the class-action Braam v. State of Washington lawsuit.

Clearly, reform is not optional. Moreover, the state will face a series of deadlines in 2006 for taking a lengthy list of concrete steps specified under the Braam settlement in areas including stabilizing foster care placements, providing adequate training and support to foster parents, and ensuring timely delivery of services to foster children. These mandatory reforms must be funded. They can't wait until 2007.

If approached correctly, this mandated reform of the child welfare system represents an opportunity to improve the system for all children. This won't happen, though, if the state's Children's Administration does not address the disproportionately poor outcomes faced by children of color. At every point in the continuum, African American and Native American children fare worse. These children are more likely to be removed from their homes, stay in the foster care system longer and are moved more frequently. If we as a state are to reform the foster care system for all children, we must address the needs of those children who fare the worst.

Finally, the Department of Social and Health Services relies on nonprofits and individuals to provide services the state is not in a position to offer. Over the past three years, therapeutic foster care parents and private agencies that serve the most troubled children and youth in the foster care system have received only a 1% pay increase. In fact, rates the state pays to these individuals and organizations fall more than 10% short of covering the basic needs of children in the state's Behavioral Rehabilitative Services program. As a result, some providers have closed while others are struggling to find private donations that will cover the shortfall. This intensive program is capable of turning things around for families and children who have mental health issues, drug and alcohol problems, histories of abuse, and suicide attempts. The state owes it to its partners to increase the reimbursement rates.

FACTS/IMPACTS

- More than 45,000 Washington children were abused or neglected in 2003, based on state investigations of suspected cases reported by the community. --DSHS Children's Administration, 2003
- African American children are three times more likely than Caucasian children to be placed in foster care, and four times more likely to be in care longer than two years. Native American children are five times more likely than Caucasian children to be placed in foster care and five times more likely to remain there longer than two years. --Washington Permanency Report 1998-2003, Families for Kids Partnership
- Of the children placed in foster care in, 36 percent remain there for more than 2 years. --DSHS Children's Administration, 2003
- One in six children in foster care for longer than a couple of months ends up moving to at least three different homes. --DSHS Children's Administration, 2003
- African American and Native American children together make up eight percent of the child population in King County, but account for:
 - 25 percent of the children accepted for investigation once they are referred to Child Protective Services.
 - 33 percent of all children removed from their homes and placed in foster care.
 - 50 percent of the children still in out-of-home care four years after placement. --King County Coalition on Racial Disproportionality, November 2004

For more information about child welfare:

<http://www.childrensalliance.org/whatwedo/fostercare-campaign.cfm>

**For more information on policy decisions affecting kids and families in Washington, contact:
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