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NEW REPORT: LACK OF CHILD ABUSE & NEGLECT PREVENTION COSTS THE U.S. OVER \$100 BILLION DOLLARS A YEAR

Austin, TX— According to a new economic impact analysis by Prevent Child Abuse America, child abuse and neglect cost the United States nearly \$104 billion a year. Child abuse and neglect are preventable, yet in 2006, nearly 68,000 Texas children—one million kids nationwide—were confirmed victims of child maltreatment. A just-released study by Kids Are Waiting, an initiative of The Pew Charitable Trusts, finds that the unavailability of federal child welfare funding for prevention programs and services is in part to blame. On average, only 10 percent of federal money dedicated for child welfare can currently be used to prevent child abuse and neglect. According to the report, 8% of federal dollars allocated to Texas for child welfare were used for prevention in 2006. Both reports are available at www.kidsarewaiting.org.

“Prevention programs can help keep families together and keep children out of foster care,” said Scott McCown, Executive Director of the Center for Public Policy Priorities, a Kids Are Waiting state partner. “But prevention programs always face the first cuts when it comes budget crunch time. With more flexibility with federal dollars and a stronger state commitment, Texas could prevent more children from being the victims of abuse and neglect.”

Barriers to Prevention

Federal Financing Structure Inadequate

The Kids Are Waiting report, *Time for Reform: Preventing Child Abuse and Neglect*, finds that the current federal child welfare financing structure does not adequately fund services and supports that could help keep more children safely with their families. The report shows that the majority of dedicated federal funding for child welfare is currently reserved for placing and maintaining children in foster care and cannot be used for prevention or reunification services or programs.

According to data from the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS), 83 percent of confirmed victims of child maltreatment involved allegations of physical or medical neglect, or neglectful supervision in 2006. Neglect often results from families having difficulty accessing needed services and supports. Preventative services are important in fighting neglect, yet Texas is restricted in its use of federal funds to support prevention programs.

Budget Cuts in Texas

Although the federal restrictions are huge barriers, Texas is not off the hook. Texas should commit more of its own state funds for prevention. Five years ago, Texas significantly cut its budget for prevention programs. Although the 2007 legislature restored some of this money, prevention programs are getting 3.5% less in 2008 than they did in 2003.

Some Progress in Texas

Texas has made some recent gains. In 2007, a bill was passed to fund one specific prevention program—the Nurse-Family Partnership. The Partnership is a proven nurse home visiting program for low-income, first time parents and their children that provides families with a support network. The program operates in more than 20 states.

In addition, DFPS is currently implementing programs designed to keep families together, including an enhanced in-home support program and increased services to families to keep children from coming into foster care in the first place, but funding is limited and too few families can be served. DFPS has also been tasked with developing a long-term child abuse and prevention plan, but without adequate funding, the plan will never get off the ground.

Recommendations

The Kids Are Waiting report recommends specific federal policy options to keep children safe and strengthen families:

- Ensure a sufficient, flexible and reliable federal resource to help support the continuum of services needed by at-risk children and families. States need to be able to spend federal funds flexibly in order to provide services that can help more children safely stay in their home or return to their families from foster care.
- Reward states for safely reducing the number of children in foster care and achieving all forms of permanence.
- Make all abused and neglected children eligible for federal foster care support.

On the state level, Texas should:

- Restore state spending on prevention programs to pre-2003 levels. While the pre-2003 levels will not cover all of the needs in Texas, it will be a step in the right direction.
- Build on state successes in 2007 by funding more programs aimed at keeping families together.
- Address the larger issue that is plaguing so many families—poverty. Since neglect is so large a part of the problem of child maltreatment, helping families earn more is an important prevention strategy. Approximately 60% of children who enter foster care come from families with annual earnings of \$10,000 or less.

To learn more, sign up for e-mails, or make a donation, go to www.cppp.org.

The Center for Public Policy Priorities is a nonpartisan, nonprofit research organization committed to improving public policies to better the economic and social conditions of low- and moderate-income Texans.