

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SOCIAL WORKERS

Issue: Strengthen Child Welfare Service Delivery to Enhance Child and Family Well-Being

BACKGROUND

Social workers play a critical role in child welfare systems nationwide by protecting the well-being of children and youths and supporting families in need. In fiscal year 2013, an estimated 679,000 children were found to have experienced maltreatment, with children under the age of one being the most likely to have been maltreated.¹ Of the children and youths who are abused or neglected, 36% are placed in foster care.

In 2013, there were 402,378 children and youths in foster care and 19,499 young people aged out of foster care. It is also estimated that 1,484 children die each year due to child abuse and neglect, and most experts report that this number may be much higher.² Ensuring that the needs of children who experience or who are at risk for maltreatment are addressed is critical as the impact of adverse childhood experiences cascades throughout the lifetime, resulting in higher risks for health and mental health issues, and adverse economic and employment outcomes.³

A qualified and stable child welfare workforce is the foundation of child welfare service delivery. Each day, social workers face critical decisions about the lives of these vulnerable children and youths while working in stressful environments that include high caseloads and workloads, inadequate supervision, safety concerns, and limited training and resources (for example, access to emerging technology). All of these conditions, coupled with low salaries and administrative burdens, can affect the recruitment and retention of qualified staff. Child welfare systems across the country are stretched beyond capacity, causing many social work professionals to be extremely overburdened. With solid education and training, supervision and support, and access to the appropriate resources, social workers can effectively serve children, youths, and families involved in child welfare to ensure healthier outcomes and enhanced well-being.

POLICY SOLUTIONS

- » Ensure that efforts focused on federal financing for child welfare services include provisions that maintain a stable and well-qualified child welfare workforce.
- » Promote incentives for BSW and MSW students to pursue child welfare work through student stipends and loan forgiveness programs and educational leave for current child welfare workers to ensure that social workers and those who care for children and families receive appropriate education and training, adequate salaries, and manageable caseloads.
- » Protect the Social Services Block Grant (SSBG) from budget cuts and elimination. SSBG funds critical services to prevent child maltreatment and improve outcomes for children who have been maltreated or are at risk of abuse or neglect.
- » Build on programs serving children and families such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (or TANF); Maternal and Child Health Services Block Grant Program; Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program, and Head Start to offer a variety of child maltreatment prevention services.

¹ U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, & Children's Bureau. (2015). *Child maltreatment 2013*. Retrieved from www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/cb/cm2013.pdf

² U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, & Children's Bureau. (2014). *The AFCARS report*. Retrieved from www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/cb/afcarsreport21.pdf

³ Institute of Medicine. (2013). *New directions in child abuse and neglect research*. Retrieved from www.nap.edu/catalog/18331/new-directions-in-child-abuse-and-neglect-research

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