

# KANSAS MENTAL HEALTH COALITION

.....*Speaking with one voice to meet the critical needs of people with mental illness*

## Support Prevention Services through the Federal Family First Prevention Services Act

**Statement/Position:** The Coalition supports matching funds (50%) to expand mental health and substance abuse services through the Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA), a new federal law that provides additional resources to improve outcomes for children and families who are struggling with substance use disorders, mental health challenges, or other stressors that lead to maltreatment.

**The Problem:** The number of youth placed in foster care in Kansas has expanded by almost 50% over the last six years to approximately 7,600 children placed in the custody of the State. Meanwhile, referrals to in-home family preservation services have been capped based on funding levels that have not increased proportionally. Many more children could benefit from targeted family supports to prevent the trauma of being removed from the home. As early as October 1, 2019, the FFPSA allows the use of federal Title IV-E child welfare funds – previously limited only to youth placed in foster care - to safely prevent foster care placements. The FFPSA will fund evidence-based mental health, substance use, and parent skill-building services to children, their families, and pregnant and parenting foster youth.

Prevention services that improve child and family well-being in-home will reduce the number of children in foster care.

**Why this matters:** We know children have the best chance to thrive if all possible strategies for keeping them with their families are explored. And we know that certain services have been shown through rigorous evaluation to improve child safety and well-being outcomes. The FFPSA will fund services to children to prevent placement in foster care, and requires that the services provided be effective. Services eligible for funding under FFPSA will include those that are known to improve child safety, child permanency, child well-being, and parent well-being. The FFPSA will support Kansas in our efforts to reach the most vulnerable Kansas children with effective interventions to help them thrive.

At the same time, the Kansas foster care system is struggling to meet the needs of children, due in part to limited options for long-term homes for children. Supporting prevention services that improve child and family well-being in-home will ensure that our foster care services can be targeted only to those children and youth who cannot safely remain at home.

**The bottom line:** The FFPSA will allow Kansas to expand and build proven interventions for children, pregnant and parenting youth, and families and caregivers through mental health treatment, substance use disorder treatment, and counseling and parent skills training. These services can reduce trauma and support positive outcomes for children. The opportunity for FFPSA prevention funding could not be more timely for youth and families needing effective and innovative mental health supports in Kansas.

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## The Rest of the Story

The federal Family First Prevention Services Act was signed into law as part of the Bipartisan Budget Act on February 9, 2018. This act reforms the federal child welfare financing streams, Title IV-E and Title IV-B of the Social Security Act, to provide services to families who are at risk of entering the child welfare system. The bill aims to prevent children from entering foster care by allowing federal reimbursement for mental health services, substance use treatment, and in-home parenting skill training. It also seeks to improve the well-being of children already in foster by incentivizing states to reduce placement of children in congregate care.

For Kansas, the opportunity to support children and families through the FFPSA comes at a critical time. Nationally, the number of children placed in foster care is rising, but Kansas has exceeded the national trend. The per capita rate of youth placed in foster care in Kansas is almost double the national average. Yet, 76% of youth placed in foster care in Kansas are referred for reasons of neglect, and 46% of families have substance use as a contributing factor. Removals of children from the home for placement in foster care continue to rise while our State's investment in prevention has not kept pace. Funding for Family Preservation services has remained constant at \$10 million each year despite the increasing number of children at risk for entry into foster care. Children of families who are eligible for Family Preservation services are referred to foster care when the quota of Family Preservation referrals has been reached.

FFPSA Title IV-E prevention funding will expand the availability of trauma-informed, evidence-based interventions specifically targeted to prevent the placement of children in foster care. Many Kansas providers across multiple disciplines – child welfare, juvenile offender, mental health, substance use, and home-visiting – already provide the type of evidence-based services permitted under the FFPSA. Using FFPSA can expand the reach of well-supported, supported, and promising interventions for the most vulnerable children and families. In addition, the FFPSA can create sustainability for various programs and services currently limited to grant and research funding. FFPSA prevention funding can strengthen child and family wellbeing, reduce the strain on the state's foster care system capacity, and reduce the costs of foster care placements.

The FFPSA strengthens families and protects children by funding services to prevent out-of-home-placement for all identified “candidates for foster care.” Beginning on October 1, 2019, the FFPSA will match 50% of Kansas' administration, training, and program investment for FFPSA prevention services. In 2026, the 50% federal match will increase to the Kansas FMAP rate, currently 56%. FFPSA funds will cover administration, training, and program operating costs for eligible services.