

LYCOMING CHILDREN AND YOUTH SERVICES

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Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. My name is Matthew Salvatori. I am the Assistant Administrator at Lycoming County Children and Youth Services and have held this position for five years and have been in the field of county child welfare for over 23 years.

The Family First Prevention Services Act passed on February 9, 2018 and will begin implementation in Pennsylvania in October of 2021 has prompted my testimony. I thank you for this opportunity to share my hopes as well as concerns for the rural counties throughout Pennsylvania.

Lycoming County has worked diligently over the last two years to be prepared for the implementation of Family First. The Agency's goal is to expand and create a stronger more diverse foster care program to meet the needs of the children within our foster care system. Lycoming Children and Youth Services currently does not have any youth in congregate care at this time.

The Family First Prevention Act has provided counties in Pennsylvania the opportunity to focus on prevention and being proactive. This will allow us to use the federal dollar for prevention services rather than placement services. It is our hope that the redistribution of these funds to evidence based prevention services will keep more families intact and, if a child needs removed from their home, funding will support placement in a more family like setting rather than congregate care such as a group home or residential facility.

I see areas that will be challenging for rural counties within Pennsylvania to effectively achieve the desired goals and federal reimbursement from the prevention aspect of the legislation. The first area of concern is having infrastructure in rural counties to be able to provide these types of services. The majority of smaller counties do not have a wide array of providers for in home prevention type services. There are a couple reasons for that; one being having enough families that meet the evidence-based program acceptance criteria to sustain a program financially. Private providers are reluctant to start new programs in rural counties without adequate guarantees of client utilization and program sustainability. The implementation date of Oct 2021 poses another challenge, especially with developing the infrastructure to work with private providers to look at the development of evidence-based programs while having enough time to make informed decisions on whether to pursue these types of services. If the implementation date could be moved back and give counties and providers more time to work on implementing the services, it would be advantageous for the success of creating successful prevention

services. The last year has been very challenging for counties during the pandemic and creating any new type of service with a start date that will occur in the next seven months will be very difficult for providers.

The second area of concern is candidacy to be eligible for the program. To determine eligibility for the program, the child must be at significant risk of entering foster care. The child has to be monitored for safety and risk throughout the life of the service. I truly believe this creates barriers for the family to have the desire to want this type of intervention. Families being aware of this requirement are going to be more guarded and less willing to accept the intervention. To be successful with prevention you need to limit these types of requirements and engage with the families at day one in a positive strength-based approach. I have personally had a big part in creating many of our prevention services within our Agency. I have found that the more freedom given to administer preventive services creates a quicker response time and a service that can be more individualized. The Agency can focus on more children and families, not just those at risk of foster care placement.

There are areas of the legislation that are positive for all counties, specifically the children that may have to be removed from their homes. The law focuses on the importance of using the most family like setting as possible when removing the child from their home. It also discourages the use of congregate care settings that do not meet the guidelines to be a qualified placement setting. Federal reimbursement will not occur after the first 14 days of placement in a congregate care setting unless specific requirements of that facility are met, but placement in a foster home will be reimbursed. This incentive is an excellent change as all counties should try to keep children within their own communities and in the most family-like settings. The legislation encourages the expansion of foster care and when there are no other options, encourages counties to utilize more qualified congregate care settings.

Respectfully,

Matthew Salvatori

Assistant Administrator

Lycoming Children and Youth Services