

# CHALLENGES & SOLUTIONS IN WEST VIRGINIA'S CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM

CHALLENGE AREA	CHALLENGES IN WV CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM	SOLUTIONS POSED BY FOSTER PARENTS & OTHER ADVOCATES
<b>Challenges with Planning and Prevention</b>	Sixty cents per child spent on primary prevention of child abuse; 1,000 times that spent on health and social needs of children in foster care	Increase funding for quality and effective child abuse prevention programs and initiatives that build family protective factors that reduce the likelihood of child abuse and neglect including improved economic security, concrete support in times of need, social connections, parental resilience and knowledge of parenting and child development.
	Lack of comprehensive planning to address the needs of families and children coming into the system	Invest time and funding in comprehensive community planning at the local and state levels with accountability to the legislature for meeting benchmarks, with a post-audit.
<b>Challenges with Availability of Services and Resources</b>	Children come into care at high rates	Study why West Virginia brings children into care at a higher rate than other states, including review of rates by judicial circuit; Implement targeted best practices in reducing child removal rate; Increase funding for preventing child abuse before it happens
	Children stay in the system too long	Provide targeted focus on reducing the time children are in the system through focused efforts on reunification or on finding adoptive families
	Shortage of foster families with available beds	Ensure foster parents have rights, voice, protection, peer support, and access to someone who supports their best interests in the legal system; Involve satisfied and supported foster parents in recruiting others using their positive experiences.
	Dissatisfied foster parents closing their homes	Consistently give foster parents a voice in children's cases – in the courtroom, with guardians ad litem, with workers; Provide regular and coordinated peer support from fellow foster and adoptive parents; Increasing foster parent satisfaction and retention increases positive word-of-mouth in recruitment
	Inconsistently applied standards for becoming foster parents	Create a clear standard for home studies based on safety, not cosmetic issues; Train all home finders in appropriate standards and expectations; Monitor home studies for inappropriate expectations.
	Not enough CPS workers, creating high case loads	Increase pay, improve working conditions, and hire more workers to reduce case loads
	Too many children sent out of state for treatment or placement due to lack of appropriate in state services and other factors	Increase funding and resources for high quality, evidence-based children's behavioral health treatment options in West Virginia including both in-patient and out-patient treatment options
	Available services are not provided consistently across and even within counties.	Conduct a needs assessment through the statewide foster parent association to determine needs and gaps; conduct coordinated planning and provide needed services statewide for all children in the child welfare system.
	Child care for working parents is provided inconsistently from county to county and many foster parents are denied free child care due to individual Child Care Resource & Referral Agency policies.	Ensure that every child in foster care is provided with quality child care regardless of foster parent income, type of employment, or other factors.

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<b>Challenges with Caregiver Support</b>	Foster families are not included in decision-making – in individual cases or in policy changes	Sustainably fund and support a statewide association of foster, adoptive, and kinship parents for advocacy and support; provide a role for association representatives in policy-making decisions and program implementation
	Foster parents often are not allowed in court proceedings regarding the child in their home	Require all courts statewide to establish a process for allowing foster parents in the courtroom for relevant proceedings; Establish a clear procedure for allowing foster parents to have a voice in the legal process regarding the children in their homes; Allow foster parents, as members of the multi-disciplinary team (MDT), to review all reports submitted to the court
	Foster parents are not allowed to make day-to-day decisions about care of children in their home	Enforce policies statewide which are already in place <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Prudent Parenting (<i>federal law</i>)</li> <li>○ Foster parent attendance at MDT (<i>DHHR policy</i>)</li> <li>○ Foster parent voice in the courtroom (<i>federal law</i>)</li> </ul>
	Lack of financial and other support for relative caregivers who care for children, and lack of comprehensive system for matching relative caregivers with appropriate levels of support and best possible legal arrangements	Provide financial and other support immediately upon placement of a child.
	Lack of post-adoption support for families caring for children who have experienced trauma	Increase funding and resources for post-adoption services, including peer support, to support permanency
<b>Challenges with the Legal System</b>	Guardians ad litem (GALs) typically make decisions without talking to children, foster parents, or others	Establish real oversight and accountability for guardians ad litem; Require GALs submit reports to the court and to all members of the MDT, including foster parents
	Overwhelmed judges who often don't read all pertinent case information	Establish real oversight and accountability for judges including requiring Supreme Court to hear all appeals
	Those who transport children to and supervise visits with birth parents often provide inconsistent reports and typically do not attend MDT meetings or court hearings to provide additional relevant information	Provide standardized reporting form for all transporters/visit supervisors; Require transporters/visit supervisors to attend MDT meetings and court hearings.
	Multi-disciplinary team (MDT) meetings happen inconsistently and are often merely a brief gathering of a few attorneys immediately before or after a hearing	Establish real oversight and accountability for MDTs, including mandatory sign-in sheets and documented notification to all MDT members. Evaluate feasibility of family-based decision-making approaches similar to Pennsylvania.
	Foster parents often not allowed to attend MDT meetings	Require that foster parents be invited to attend and participate in the MDT and schedule the meeting at a time when they are available; Document attendance via sign-in sheets submitted to the court
	At least nine people involved in each child's case, often with little or no communication between parties	Require that all individuals involved in the case attend MDT meeting and have meaningful participation
	Children have no voice in cases that affect their lives and need a representative to speak on their behalf.	Provide state funding to expand the Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) program so every child involved in an abuse and neglect case proceeding has a CASA.
	Overall lack of checks and balances in the system	Create an independent ombudsman or child advocate with ability to enforce foster parent's and foster child's bills of rights, investigate systemic problems, and make recommendations for system improvements