

Executive Order on Strengthening the Child Welfare System for America's Children

States and communities have both a legal obligation, and the privilege, to care for our Nation's most vulnerable children. These children include those who are at risk of, or who have already experienced, child maltreatment. Our country's child welfare system is charged with strengthening families by supporting community-based prevention efforts that protect children from abuse and neglect; implementing effective family preservation services that keep children safe with their own families, preventing the need for foster care; and utilizing foster care as a time-limited intervention with oversight by the court to ensure timely permanency through reunification, adoption or guardianship.

Currently, there are more than 400,000 children in foster care. Too many of these children wait years to find permanency with a family. More than 124,000 children and youth are currently waiting for adoption, and more than half of them have been waiting more than two years. Approximately 20,000 youth age out of foster care annually without achieving permanency. Prolonged time in foster care is detrimental to child well-being. Therefore, it is critical that we strengthen our child welfare system in order to improve the outcomes experienced by America's children.

This Executive Order (EO) aims to strengthen America's child welfare system through three key actions: improving partnerships, improving resources and improving oversight.

- 1) Improving Partnerships:** This EO will encourage robust partnerships between state agencies and public, private, faith-based and community organizations by (1) publishing localized data that can be used to aid in the development of community-based prevention and family support services and in the recruitment of foster and adoptive families; (2) holding states accountable for recruiting an adequate number of foster and adoptive homes for all children; and (3) providing guidance to States on best practices to work effectively with all community partners.
- 2) Improving Resources:** This EO will improve access to adequate resources for all parents by (1) expanding educational options for foster and adoptive parents, (2) increasing access to trauma-informed training, (3) expanding State access to financial help for guardianships, (4) enhancing support for kinship care and older youth exiting foster care, and (5) ensuring equality of treatment and access for all families through monitored compliance with the Multiethnic Placement Act.
- 3) Improving Oversight:** This EO will improve federal oversight of key statutory requirements by (1) requiring Title IV-E Reviews and Child and Family Services Reviews to strengthen the assessments of critical requirements, including reasonable efforts to prevent removal and to finalize permanency plans for children in foster care, filing petitions for termination of parental rights, as appropriate, within statutory timelines, and conducting family search and notification when children come into foster care; (2) issuing guidance on the use of federal funds to support high quality legal representation for parents and children; (3) developing metrics to measure and evaluate state performance in achieving permanency; and (4) collecting information on State safety and risk assessments, which informs decisions regarding removal and reunification.