

The Pew Commission on Children and Foster Care Facts

The Pew Commission on Children and Foster Care (funded through a grant from the Pew Charitable Trusts to the Georgetown Public Policy Institute) began its work to develop recommendations for improving the nation's foster care system on May 2003 and produced their report entitled *Fostering Our Future: Safety, Permanency, and Well-Being for Children in Foster Care* on May 18, 2004. The report recommends broad changes in federal funding of foster care and in court reform of foster care cases. The report makes no distinction between traditional, publicly administered foster care and privatized treatment foster care. One result of the report was the introduction of the Child SAFE Act (HR 4856) on July 19, 2004 by Representative Herger (R-CA). The proposal combines a flexible funding strategy based upon recommendations contained in the Pew Commission's report. Many national child associations are in strong opposition to the proposed act due to several of its recommendations, including one to cap foster care funding, while not strengthening outcomes for youth in foster care.

Excerpt from the Pew Commission Executive Summary provides an overview of the report:

“The Commission focused its work on two targeted areas:

- Improving existing federal financing mechanisms to facilitate faster movement of children from foster care into safe, permanent families and to reduce the need to place children in foster care in the first place; and
- Improving court oversight of child welfare cases to facilitate better and more timely decisions related to children's safety, permanence, and well-being.

The key components of the Commission's financing recommendations are:

- Preserving federal foster care maintenance and adoption assistance as an entitlement and expanding it to all children, regardless of their birth families' income and including Indian children in the U.S. territories;
- Providing federal guardianship assistance to all children who leave foster care to live with a permanent legal guardian when a court has explicitly determined that neither reunification nor adoption are feasible permanence options;
- Helping states build a range of services from prevention, to treatment, to post-permanence by (1) creating a flexible, indexed Safe Children, Strong Families Grant from what is currently included in Title IV-B and the administration and training components of Title IV-E; and (2) allowing states to “reinvest” federal and state foster care dollars into other child welfare services if they safely reduce their use of foster care.
- Encouraging innovation by expanding and simplifying the waiver process and providing incentives to states that (1) make and maintain improvements in their child welfare workforce and (2) increase all forms of safe permanence; and
- Strengthening the current Child and Family Services Review process to increase states' accountability for improving outcomes for children.

The Commission's court recommendations call for:

- Adoption of court performance measures by every dependency court to ensure that they can track and analyze their caseloads, increase accountability for improved outcomes for children, and inform decisions about the allocation of court resources;
- Incentives and requirements for effective collaboration between courts and child welfare agencies on behalf of children in foster care;
- A strong voice for children and parents in court and effective representation by better trained attorneys and volunteer advocates;
- Leadership from Chief Justices and other state court leaders in organizing their court systems to better serve children, provide training for judges, and promote more effective standards for dependency courts, judges, and attorneys.”

For more information on the Pew Commission on Children and Foster Care:

www.pewfostercare.org

The Pew Commission on Children in Foster Care

www.fosteringresults.org/results/reports.htm

Fostering Results/Children and Family Resource Center at the School of Social Work,
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

www.cwla.org/advocacy/pewcommissionsummary.htm

Child Welfare League of America's Pew Commission Summary Report

www.childrensdefense.org/childwelfare/legislative/child_safe_act_factsheet.pdf

Children's Defense Fund Child SAFE Act Fact Sheet