**Federal Family First Prevention Services Act State-Level Implementation**

**Sample Messages Using the “Building Well-Being” Frame**

**Overarching Recommendations:**

* Open with the value of human potential to orient the discussion around the broader societal benefits of implementing Family First.
* Rely on the construction metaphor to explain that well-being is built, needs to be maintained and may need to be repaired when impacted by life’s storms, such as mental and behavioral health challenges and substance abuse.
* Rely on concepts like brain architecture and toxic stress to explain how experiences and environments shape child development.
* Explain how the services/supports allowable under Family First are linked to potential and well-being.
* Share specific actions the audience can take to support implementation.

**Sample Core Message:**

When [INSERT STATE] supports child and family well-being, we ensure that everyone can reach their full potential and contribute their skills and talents to benefit our communities. Using federal Title IVE entitlement funding under the Family First Prevention Services Act (Family First) for prevention services to keep families safely together promotes child and family potential and well-being.

Building lasting family well-being is like building a sturdy house. Both require quality materials, thoughtful planning, and timely expert support for necessary maintenance and repairs. Just as a house can be damaged by severe weather, a family’s ability to provide the nurturing, supportive environments and experiences that children need to thrive can be impacted by life’s storms, such as mental and behavioral health challenges and parental substance use disorders. When left unaddressed, these conditions can lead to a child being removed from their home and placed into foster care. This traumatic experience creates toxic levels of stress that undermine a child’s developing brain and disrupt health, learning and development.

[INSERT STATE] has the opportunity to use Family First funding to address these challenges to family well-being early and safely prevent unnecessary parent-child separations and entries into foster care. Supports that are newly fundable by Title IVE under Family First, including mental health services, substance abuse prevention and treatment services and parent skill-building services such as home visiting programs, and individual and family counseling.

Because services must be trauma-informed and meet evidence-based requirements, they are designed to be as effective as possible at keeping families safely together and preventing unnecessary foster care placements, decreasing the likelihood that a child will experience toxic stress and its harmful effects. Additionally, by safely diverting children from foster care, the strain on our state’s limited foster placement capacity can be reduced, improving placement services for children whose safety depends on foster care.

**Sample Additional Message for Judges, Attorneys, and other Court-system related audiences:**

*Include or adapt this sample message when reaching out to Court system related audiences.*

In addition to the opportunities The Family First Act offers to help keep families safely together when possible, the new law also contains requirements to ensure a child is only placed in a residential or congregate setting, called a Qualified Residential Treatment Program, when it is necessary to meet their needs for mental and/or behavioral health treatment.

The new law creates an opening to consider the practices and procedures that are within the jurisdiction of the courts. [INSERT ORGANIZATION NAME] would like to work with you [Judge, District Attorney, etc] to explore ways that the vision of the Family First Act can be fully realized in [your court room/the local court room] and in our state, including legislative advocacy that will be required to adequately finance the prevention services. We also want to be sure you know that you can contact [INSERT STATE’s] Court Improvement Project to learn more about the technical implementation of the law. In our state, the Family First Act will go into effect on [INSERT FFPSA LAUNCH DATE FOR YOUR STATE].

**Sample Additional Message for State Appropriations**

*Include or adapt this sample message when making the case for appropriating state funding to foster care prevention services.*

Just like constructing a home on a weak foundation is likely to lead to structural damage and costly repairs, a child developing on an unstable foundation, created by toxic stress, is more likely to experience negative consequences, including health, mental health, and behavioral challenges, now and into the future. Unnecessarily placing a neglected or abused child in foster care compounds toxic stress by re-traumatizing the child. Foster care should not be our state’s only response to child abuse and neglect. Nurturing and strengthening protective parent-child relationships, family ties, and appropriate experiences are less expensive and produce desirable outcomes. [INSERT STATE] needs to invest in [evidence-based practices/the Family First Prevention Program] as a way to keep families safely together whenever possible, so that State General Fund expenditures for its more costly foster care program are only tapped when absolutely necessary to ensure child safety. Foster care is only one of the tools the state needs to respond to child abuse and neglect. It’s time for the state to [further] expand its toolbox.