

## The Coronavirus Pandemic: Leveraging Federal Child Welfare Programs

*Contributors: Marlo Nash, Rachel Marsh, Jody Grutza, Kali Scolnick, Kerry Littlewood*

When Congress passed the bi-partisan Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) in 2018, it set up a program that can be leveraged as part of the country's COVID response and recovery efforts. Children and families who may become involved in the child welfare system as a result of intense, increased stressors and trauma caused by COVID-19 need every opportunity to restore the well-being of their family unit and keep their children out of foster care. The [Title IV-E Prevention Program](#) in the FFPSA is designed for that purpose.

The family-centered, trauma-informed law gives the federal, state and tribal governments the ability to work in concert to reach, preserve and treat communities and families whose children have become at imminent risk of entering foster care as a fallout from the pandemic. Currently, there are a handful of states who have enacted FFPSA and unwittingly begun to prepare to respond to this pandemic by securing an approved prevention plan.

### **Congress can help by:**

- Addressing barriers to states' ability to more immediately enact the IV-E Prevention Services Program
- Increasing the Promoting Safe and Stable Families appropriation
- Increasing FMAP for IV-E Prevention Services now rather than sticking to the scheduled date of FY26 that is in the current law.
- Continue to support kinship navigator programs.

### **The Children's Bureau can help by:**

- Working with the IV-E Prevention Services Clearinghouse to prioritize the inclusion of evidence-based services that are particularly suited to stabilize families in the wake of a disaster, and by expediting the approval of states' prevention plans as part of its response to the crisis.

### **State, local and tribal leaders can:**

- Invest funds from the Family First Transition Act (FFTA) to ameliorate current strategies and prepare to address the expected influx of child protection reports and family needs resulting from the pandemic.
- Link pandemic-induced adversities to their FFPSA candidacy definitions, such as domestic violence (approved in Arkansas' plan), parental support to respond to serious child behavioral problems (approved in Utah's plan), and heightened parent stressors that could lead to maltreatment (approved in Maryland's plan).
- Appropriate the state-level financing required to draw down the federal reimbursement at levels that will serve all families who need FFPSA services and supports, including those impacted by the pandemic.

- Consider the pandemic a clarion call for completing or modifying state prevention plans as part of the strategy to recover from the pandemic without increasing the size of the foster care population.

We know that a mental health crisis, is coming in the wake of the physical crisis caused by the coronavirus pandemic. The early warning system telling us to “prepare now” is a call to be innovative and strategic in exploring new options using the tools – like FFPSA and FFTA – that we have.

Learn more about necessary steps during the pandemic to

- Prevent child maltreatment
- Respond to trauma

*The Saint Francis Ministries and Grutza Consulting partnership offers technical assistance and consultation to public and private leaders who are implementing the Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA). The combined team of experts brings real-time perspective and information from work in more than a dozen states and nationally to help with: strategic leveraging of opportunities and financing streams, public-private engagement, transition processes, accreditation support, focus on population segments, such as young children, juvenile offenders, and children and families dealing with the COVID-19 effects.*