

WSSC 2009 LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

PRINCIPLES

Policies on taxes, work, divorce, immigration, and welfare should help families stay together and should reward responsibility and sacrifice for children....Children are to be valued, protected, and nurtured. As a Church, we affirm our commitment to the protection and well-being of children in our own institutions and in all of society.

Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship, USCCB, 2007

CHILD WELFARE: Children who are in danger of entering the child welfare system or those who are in the system deserve society's full attention and protection. The goals are to prevent children from entering the system, to ensure a stable placement, if needed, to prioritize placement with relatives, and to commit to quality child care.

AGENCIES: Child placing agencies in the state have been faced with increasing responsibilities, but fewer financial resources to provide adequate support to their foster families in need of assistance. A national study recently reported that Washington's reimbursement rates to child placing agencies are well below the resources required to provide a minimum level of services.

EARLY LEARNING AND CARE: The recent economic downturn has resulted in many parents losing their jobs. Low-income parents frequently lose their subsidized child care as a result, disrupting the child and the parent's ability to find work. Care centers struggle to meet their financial obligations when the families leave. Research indicates the stability of care during the early years leads to greater success in social emotional development and academics. Quality care, staff training and, early intervention have been shown to promote positive outcomes for at-risk children.

CHILD DEPENDENCY: Families and children who find themselves involved in court proceedings such as child welfare hearings, dependencies, or terminations are often without adequate knowledge of the legal system. Key improvements are necessary to ensure a just process including well-trained court personnel, parent representation, and prevention programs directed to families at risk of dependency proceedings, and appropriate representation for children.

RECOMMENDATIONS

WSSC SUPPORTS:

- Prevention programs, wrap-around programs, and child welfare system improvements
- Kinship program improvement
- Initiatives to address racial disproportionality in child welfare
- Increased support for foster parents
- Respite opportunities for foster parents
- Increased child welfare vendor rates for agencies that contract with the state
- Lengthening eligibility of families receiving subsidies for child care
- Early intervention for at-risk children through programs such as home visitation or early identification
- Representation programs for children in dependency cases, improvements to family courts, and expanding the Parent Representation Project