

# **A Better Future for Children: Family Focused Child Support- Child Welfare Services**

**Diane Potts, Director of Child Support  
The Center for the Support of Families**

# Background . . . in 2016

- ▶ 437,000 children were involved in the child welfare or foster care system
- ▶ \$2.7 billion was spent on child welfare
- ▶ 15.5 million children were involved in the child support program
- ▶ \$5.7 billion was spent on child support
- ▶ \$28.8 billion was collected
- ▶ A small percentage—only \$72.7 million was collected in foster care cases

# Background . . . Goals

- ▶ Goal of child welfare system is to:
  - ▶ Protect children
  - ▶ Preserve and reunify families
- ▶ Goal of child support system is to:
  - ▶ Get financial support for children
  - ▶ Prevent poverty or lift families out of poverty

# Background . . . Overlap & Research

- ▶ High probability of agency overlap due to:
  - ▶ Children living in single-parent families overrepresented in child welfare system
  - ▶ Mandatory cooperation
- ▶ “Despite the overlap in populations served, there is remarkably little research on the interaction of the child support and [child welfare] systems.”

Cancian, M., Cook, S. T., Seki, M., & Wimer, L. (2017). Making parents pay: The unintended consequences of charging parents for foster care. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 72.

# Background . . . Mandatory Cooperation

- ▶ Child welfare agency is required, where appropriate to:
  - ▶ Secure assignment of support rights in foster care cases
  - ▶ Refer cases to child support agencies
- ▶ Child support agency is required to provide services on case

# TANF Mandatory Cooperation Cases

- ▶ For comparison, in TANF mandatory child support cooperation cases, referral may ultimately result in:
  - ▶ Support established and enforced against the noncustodial parent
  - ▶ Support reimbursing state and feds with pass-through going to custodial parent and child in many states
  - ▶ Enable single parent and child(ren) to become self-sufficient and move off TANF

# Foster Care Mandatory Cooperation Cases

- ▶ For foster care mandatory child support cooperation cases, referral may ultimately result in:
  - ▶ Support established and enforced against custodial and noncustodial parents
    - ▶ Parents may be residing together, can be married
  - ▶ Support reimbursing state/county
  - ▶ Diverting family funds from critical reunification goals
- ▶ Imposing financial burden on fragile parents working towards reunification may be contrary to goals of both child support and foster care programs

# Mandatory Cooperation Questions

- ▶ What is mandatory cooperation doing to child support program?
- ▶ What is mandatory cooperation doing to families in foster care program?



# Child Support Program

## Foster Care Collections in Minnesota (2015)

Total expenditures: \$138,301,873

Cost per case: \$632

Cost of collections: \$6,830,024

Expenditure per dollar collected: \$2.70

**Cost effectiveness ratio: \$0.36 collected for every \$1 spent**

National average in 2015: \$5.26 collected for every \$1 spent

Cost of collections estimates (*N = 10,807 cases, \$2,508,219 collected*)

Skophammer, Trish (2017). Child Support Collections to Offset Out-of-Home Placement Costs: A Study of Cost Effectiveness (Table 3)

# Child Support Program

Minnesota Random sample of 1,000 foster care cases over 5-year period:

- ▶ Total amount of child support collected \$317,117
- ▶ **Average collection of \$317 per case over 5 years**
- ▶ Arrears balance was \$343,508
- ▶ Only **262** had a court-ordered child support obligation
- ▶ 220 had some amount of child support collected
- ▶ 293 had order entered on case that did not include child support obligation

Skophammer, Trish (2017). Child Support Collections to Offset Out-of-Home Placement Costs: A Study of Cost Effectiveness

# Child Support Program

Minnesota: Random 1,000 foster care cases. Only 280 child support order  
Parents' 2015 annual income ( $N = 280$ )

Annual income in 2015	Number of cases at income level
No wages recorded	133
Less than \$10,000	91
\$10,000 to \$19,999	17
\$20,000 to \$29,999	16
\$30,000 to \$39,999	11
\$40,000 to \$49,999	7
\$50,000 to \$59,999	2
\$60,000 to \$69,999	1
Over \$70,000	2

Skophammer, Trish (2017). Child Support Collections to Offset Out-of-Home Placement Costs: A Study of Cost Effectiveness (Table 4)

# Child Support Program

- ▶ Orange County Foster Care Study
  - ▶ Much larger case data sample
  - ▶ **Similar** preliminary findings on **cost-effectiveness** of foster care cases statewide
  - ▶ **Similar** preliminary findings on **very low support orders**
- ▶ More research is needed!

# Child Welfare Program

- ▶ Wisconsin Study of 3,000 mothers who had child removed and placed in foster care
- ▶ Findings:
  - ▶ Foster care cases with child support order experienced longer duration to family reunification compared to cases with no child support order
  - ▶ **On average, increase in amount of support by \$100 is associated with increase in child's time in foster care by 6.6 months**

Cancian, M., Cook, S. T., Seki, M., & Wimer, L. (2017). Making parents pay: The unintended consequences of charging parents for foster care. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 72.

# No Collaboration Challenges:

- ▶ Lack of policy on “appropriate referrals”
- ▶ No interagency communication
  - ▶ Locate and termination of parental rights
  - ▶ Undoing Legal Paternity
- ▶ No referral until foster care placement
  - ▶ Child support may help single-parent retain custody

# Summary

- ▶ More research is needed to see if mandatory child support referrals are justified fiscally and by good social policy