



2019 ADVOCACY & POLICY PRIORITIES

MEMBERSHIP DRIVEN • RESEARCH INFORMED • SOLUTION FOCUSED

For 50 years, the Michigan Federation for Children and Families has provided a collective and expert voice on behalf of its members to influence federal, state, and local public policy decisions—both legislative and administrative. The Federation's **2019 Advocacy and Policy Priorities** are focused on **systemic changes** that will improve the child welfare system and lead to the **best outcomes** for vulnerable children and families receiving services delivered by the private, nonprofit human services provider network as follows:

1. Reform of Michigan's child welfare system as identified in the *Dwayne B. v. Snyder* federal court lawsuit.
2. Remedies for the inadequacies in Michigan's State-Automated Child Welfare Information System (MiSACWIS).
3. Thoughtful and collaborative implementation of the *Family First Prevention Services Act* (FFPSA).
4. Strong collaboration and partnership among all stakeholders, service providers and regulators involved in our public-private system of shared responsibility for Michigan's vulnerable children, families and communities.

Celebrating 50 years of advocacy on behalf of vulnerable children and families

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DWAYNE B. v. SNYDER FEDERAL COURT LAWSUIT.

The 2006 lawsuit is based on a legal complaint of certain unlawful policies and practices of the MDHHS, including the maltreatment or neglect of children while in state foster care custody, a lack of basic medical and mental health services for children in foster care, excessive lengths of stay in state custody, and frequent moves among multiple placements.

Progress on exiting the lawsuit has slowed considerably in part due to the flaws in MiSACWIS that have made analysis of child welfare data relevant to the lawsuit and child safety nearly impossible to access or to depend on its accuracy. Until our state is able to meet all the performance requirements of the settlement agreement and maintain performance for 18 months, federal court jurisdiction will require our state's child welfare system to be monitored and performance data analyzed to hold Michigan accountable to its promise to improve the child welfare system.

SOLUTION: While significant progress has been made in correcting many of the original deficiencies cited, there remains much more to accomplish in order to be allowed to exit monitoring under the Implementation, Sustainability, and Exit Plan (ISEP) Agreement so that Michigan may once again manage its own child welfare system. Allocate the appropriate resources so that a laser-focused attention can be paid to achieving meaningful reform through a thoughtful change process that minimizes harm to all stakeholders.

2 MICHIGAN STATE AUTOMATED CHILD WELFARE INFORMATION SYSTEM (MISACWIS). MiSACWIS was originally designed to be a management tool for monitoring all child welfare cases by tracking progress and services provided to children and families with the goal of ensuring better safety and timely permanency for children in care. As a requirement of providing child welfare services through contract with MDHHS, private nonprofit agencies began using MiSACWIS in 2014. **Already costing Michigan taxpayers over \$200 million since its development and implementation in 2014, the foundation of this system is flawed.** SACWIS, once a federal mandate for each state's child welfare system, is no longer required. Other technologies are permissible, with federal approval, and allow states still to draw down federal funds for child welfare services.

Michigan's system, MiSACWIS, is flawed to the extent that during a status conference hearing in May 2018 regarding *Dwayne B. v. Snyder*, Judge Nancy Edmunds ordered an independent, third-party evaluation of MiSACWIS. Many of the federal court's concerns regarding MiSACWIS originate from data quality issues relating to knowledge and understanding of critical issues such as children's safety and maltreatment in care, supervisory oversight, placement and permanency of children in custody. The goal of the evaluation is to identify barriers that impact the ability of MDHHS to collect and produce accurate data related to the commitments of the ISEP.

Members of the Michigan Federation for Children and Families, private nonprofit child welfare agencies under contract with the MDHHS, have formally brought critical concerns regarding MiSACWIS to MDHHS leadership since its 2014 implementation and requested an independent evaluation of the system in 2017. **In 2018, four years after its implementation, the technology system continues to be a barrier to efficiency within agencies, creating an unmanageable workload burden on caseworkers, directly increasing worker turnover and, most concerning of all, impacting communities throughout the state by limiting the time caseworkers have to spend in the field with children and families.** We are aware that many of these same concerns are echoed by MDHHS local office staff, especially relating to the crisis of increasing worker turnover rates.

SOLUTION: When recommendations of the MiSACWIS third-party evaluator are released, a public/private multi-disciplinary reform and solutions-oriented team shall meet regularly and swiftly to remedy the usability, accuracy and functionality of the system.



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3 FAMILY FIRST PREVENTION SERVICES ACT (FFPSA).

Michigan's timely and effective implementation of new federal legislation, FFPSA, signed into law February 2018 (PL 115-123) is an outstanding opportunity to strengthen families. **The landmark bipartisan legislation is designed to help children and families stay together, to keep children in their families and avoid the trauma of entering foster care by creating an expanded entitlement stream of federal funds without regard to the family's income, to support children in their families with services in place to keep them there safely.**

When children cannot be kept safe in their families and foster care is necessary, the law also emphasizes the importance of children growing up in the most family-like settings to meet their needs. **The FFPSA makes clear that in order to fully address the well-being of children, the well-being of their families and communities must be fully addressed as well.** FFPSA gives states and tribes the ability to direct their existing federal funds into an array of prevention and early intervention services to keep children safe, strengthen families and communities and reduce the need for out-of-home placements whenever it is safe to do so.

At a time **when out-of-home placement is on the rise nationally**, delaying the implementation of FFPSA in Michigan will delay our state's ability to draw down federal funding in order to expand family preservation services. This comes at a time when Michigan has reduced its funding for family preservation programming, reducing support for families, which will most likely result in **a further increase** in out-of-home placements for children.

To understand what changes will be necessary for private nonprofit agencies to comply with FFPSA, the Federation conducted a readiness assessment of its residential treatment member agencies. When all responses to the readiness assessment were averaged, Federation members achieved an overall Readiness Score of 76%. **While a lot of work and collaboration lies ahead to develop policy, statute, contracts and financing structures to achieve full readiness, the opportunity to continue strengthening an already well-designed therapeutic system of residential treatment services is full of potential.**

SOLUTION: The child welfare community—including public and private agencies, the courts, the legislature, and all stakeholders—should opt-in to full readiness in achieving the standards and requirements of the FFPSA as early as possible in order to enhance federal IV-E reimbursement draw down and maximize opportunities for vulnerable children and families in Michigan to engage with evidence-based services that improve outcomes for kids. The entire system must be involved in thoughtful and collaborative program redesign.

4 COLLABORATION AND PARTNERSHIP.

Nearly 100% of family preservation, adoption, and residential treatment services and 46% of foster care services are provided by private nonprofit agencies in Michigan. **In order to achieve successful outcomes for children and their families, strong relationships between the private agencies and the public agency are vital.**

Communication within the framework of the private agencies, MDHHS central office and the county MDHHS offices requires **meaningful collaboration where contractor input is valued equally** on issues such as contract development and practice, child welfare legislation, and review of oversight monitoring processes such as auditing by the Division of Child Welfare Licensing as well as the continued development of a performance-based system of service delivery that prioritizes permanency for children along with an actuarial-based funding model.

We strive to provide opportunities for Michigan's children and families to receive treatment and services in Michigan, where they can remain in their communities, with their families, and connected to their support systems.

SOLUTION: With strong relationships as a base, many opportunities exist in order to further strengthen how Michigan supports its children, families and communities. Private agency representation should be included in all policy planning discussions and systemic reform matters.



Michigan Federation for Children and Families

620 S. Capitol Avenue, Suite 325

Lansing MI 48933

(517) 485-8552

www.michfed.org

Federation Staff

Janet Reynolds Snyder, MBA • Executive Director • janet@michfed.org

Jenny Crichton, GMS • Office and Events Manager • jenny@michfed.org

Rose Homa • Chief Operations Officer • rose@michfed.org

Kadi Prout, LMSW • Director of Child Welfare Policy • kadi@michfed.org

