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Unheard Warriors: Creating an Effective Child Welfare Workforce

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2019

MERRIMACK COLLEGE

CAPSTONE PAPER SIGNATURE PAGE

CAPSTONE SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

MASTER OF EDUCATION

IN

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

CAPSTONE TITLE: Unheard Warriors: Creating an Effective Child Welfare Workforce

AUTHOR: Yina Cordero

THE CAPSTONE PAPER HAS BEEN ACCEPTED BY THE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT
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OF MASTER OF EDUCATION IN COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT.

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Lastly, I would like to dedicate this capstone to all child welfare workers who constantly put their own lives at risk to serve our most vulnerable population. Your work and dedication is valuable and should be continuously recognized and appreciated.

Table of Contents

Abstract

As child abuse and neglect cases continue to increase in the United States, child welfare workers continue to experience challenges that have made it increasingly difficult to adequately care for the children and families in the child welfare system. Unfortunately, this has led to increased turnover rates among child welfare workers. Policy surrounding the child welfare workforce have pushed for changes that do not appropriately address issues such as the lack of education, training, and unsafe organizational environment that child welfare workers experience daily. An extensive overview of the current state of the child welfare workforce, has demonstrated a need to look for better ways to equip child welfare workers in the areas of training, education, and organizational change, which will move the child welfare system in a better position to be able to strengthen families and keep children safe.

Keywords: child abuse and neglect, children and families, child welfare workers, child welfare workforce, turnover, policy, education, training, organizational environment

Introduction

A qualified and well-trained child welfare workforce is an essential part of the child welfare system. While child welfare workers play a critical role in the lives of children and families who enter the child welfare system, they continue to face daily challenges to live up to their role. According to a 2017 child maltreatment report, 674,000 children were victims of child abuse or neglect, an increase of 2.7% from 2013 (Child Maltreatment, 2017, pg.12). While the population of children and families who enter the child welfare system increases, child welfare workers must quickly adapt to meet their needs and keep them safe without having the proper support and resources to do this effectively. Currently, policies aimed at improving child welfare services continuously puts improving the working conditions of child welfare workers as the last priority without realizing the implications it has on the system and children and families it aims to serve (National Association of Social Workers, 2015).

Problem Statement

According to the National Association of Social Workers, child welfare workers "face critical decisions about the lives of these vulnerable children and youth while working in stressful environments that include high caseloads and workloads, inadequate supervision, safety concerns, and limited training and resources (for example, access to emerging technology)"(National Association of Social Workers, 2015, p.1). According to Casey Family Programs (2017) child welfare turnover rates have been estimated to be 20–40 percent nationally, while 10% is said to be optimal for child welfare agencies (Casey Family Programs, 2017; Child Welfare League of America, 2017b). When child welfare workers turnover rates are

the cause of poorer outcomes for children and families, it becomes more problematic and

alarming (Patel et al, 2017). The lack of support that often results in high turnover rates among

child welfare workers, negatively affect the children and families the system serves because child

welfare workers spend less time building valuable relationships with the children and families on

their caseloads (See Appendix A). This capstone aims to prove the need for federal policy

changes and continued improvements that shine a light on the needs of child welfare workers in

the areas of education, training, and organizational environment. These recommendations will

directly address the issues of high turnover rates among child welfare workers, which continues

to be a detrimental factor in the lives of children and families. These proposed changes will

better equip child welfare workers to be able to provide quality services to children and families.

However, before going into depth on these issues and solutions, it is important to understand the

complex child welfare system that exists today.

Role of the Child Welfare System

The child welfare system was created to prevent and protect children from abuse and

neglect. Its focus is to create programs that strengthen families and which value keeping

families' together, safe, and stable. When this is unable to occur due to safety concerns for the

child, finding a safe home for the child is the next step (Child Welfare Information Gateway,

2013). In most cases, families become a part of the system because of a report of child abuse or

neglect also known as child maltreatment. Child welfare agencies only intervene when parents,

primary caregivers, or extended family are the perpetrators of child maltreatment. Child

maltreatment cases caused by strangers are investigated by law enforcement (Child Welfare

Information Gateway, 2013). The child welfare system consists of many different agencies and

vary among states. However, nationally all child welfare agencies serve the same function which is to;

- Receive and investigate reports of possible child abuse and neglect

- Provide services to families that need assistance in the protection and care of their children

- Arrange for children to live with kin or with foster families when they are not safe at home

- Arrange for reunification, adoption, or other permanent family connections for children leaving foster care (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2013, p. 3)

If a child enters the child welfare system, depending on the severity of the case, they are assigned a caseworker. This worker is referred to as a caseworker or child welfare worker. For this capstone, we will refer to them as child welfare workers. The child welfare worker is responsible for investigating and identifying the level of risk the child faces if they were to stay at home (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2013). They are then tasked with the difficult decision of either keeping the child at home while providing the necessary resources (i.e. counseling, parent support groups), or removing the child from the home and into a foster care setting or with relatives, often referred to as out-of- home placements (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2013).

Stakeholders and Implications

The child welfare system has a diverse group of organizations and agencies that are committed to the well-being of children and families who enter the system (First Focus, 2014).

Understanding who these stakeholders are is important when looking at policy recommendations. The most important stakeholders are the children and families who enter the system and who are working closely with child welfare workers. Unfortunately, the concerns of children and families in the system are often overlooked (First Focus, 2014). Public child welfare agencies, which include the majority of child welfare workers, are made up of supervisors, child welfare workers (caseworkers), and administrators (First Focus, 2014). Other stakeholders to take into account are policymakers, in both the federal and state level, that make the decisions in regards to how policies and procedures are shaped and carried out. Other stakeholders include community institutions, private child welfare agencies, and courts and attorneys (First Focus, 2014). Child welfare stakeholders are all committed to supporting children and families, however ensuring that the voices of both children and families as well as child welfare workers are heard is vital to making recommendations that have a lasting impact (First Focus, 2014). A study conducted on families involved in the child welfare system found families were concerned that their workers high caseloads were hindering their relationship (Bernal, 2017). Similarly in a study conducted by Whitaker (2012), 91% of child welfare workers felt overwhelmed by their large caseload and workloads and saw it as the main factor preventing them from providing quality care to children and families. Child welfare workers and families know the importance of being able to communicate with their worker; however, these relationships are constantly being overshadowed by not only large caseloads and workloads, but also by the stress and burnout that come with it.

Funding of Child Welfare System

Child welfare workers crucial role in ensuring child and family well-being should be in the forefront of state and federal support. While states differ in the ways they use the funding

provided by the federal government, nationally child welfare agencies continue to rely heavily on

state and local funds to support various programs needed to help children and families (Jordan &

Connelly, 2016). According to a child trends report "in 2016, 56 percent of all dollars spent by

child welfare agencies came from state and local, as opposed to federal, sources. During the past

decade, these proportions have held steady" (Rosinsky & Williams, 2016, p.5). Massachusetts is

among the top three states that received the lowest amount of federal funding to support child

welfare agencies in 2016 (25% federal funding 75% state and local) (Rosinsky & Williams,

2016). Federal funding distributed to states, which fund a majority of child welfare programs,

include both Title IV-E and Title IV-B of the social security act. While funding for child welfare

programs comes primarily from Title IV-E, Title IV-B funding is more flexible and is able to

fund activities related to workforce development, however it continues to be decreased.

According to Rosinsky & Williams (2016),

> Appropriations for Title IV-B programs that primarily fund child welfare agencies have
> decreased over the past decade. As mentioned above, out of the total appropriation for the
> Promoting safe and stable families program (PSSF), funds must be set-aside for the Court
> Improvement Programs (CIP), regional partnership grants (RPGs), improvements to
> caseworker visits, and research, evaluation, training, and technical assistance. After those
> set-asides are funded, the remaining PSSF dollars are available to child welfare agencies
> for services…fewer Title IV-B dollars were left over for child welfare agencies after the
> CIP set-aside…[which led to] funds to improve caseworker visits [declining] over the
> decade (p.26).

Understanding the issues surrounding federal and state funding for child welfare agencies is an important step to be able to continue to advocate for improved funding streams that states receive to better serve child welfare workers current working conditions. The increasing and steady turnover rates in the child welfare system are one of the key trends that demonstrate a need for child welfare workers to receive more support than they currently have.

Impact of Turnover

Increasing amount of turnover rates among child welfare workers have negatively affected the children and families who enter the child welfare system. The reality is that the increased amount of turnover rates creates inconsistencies of care for children and families and ultimately puts in danger their well-being (Hansung et al. 2008). Casey Family Programs, a foundation that focuses on foster care and child welfare, found that "annual turnover rates below 10–12 percent are considered optimal or healthy. For the past 15 years, child welfare turnover rates have been estimated at 20–40 percent" (2017, p.1). They also found turnover rates to be higher among child welfare trainees ranging from 46-56% (Casey Family Programs, 2017, p.2). This means potential employees who are interested in working in the field do not receive the proper onboarding training and support causing them to leave weeks into their hiring process.

High turnover rates do not only affect children and families the system serves but the entire system. According to Casey Family Programs (2017), high turnover rates produce direct and indirect costs that affect the child welfare system. Direct costs range from costs related to overtime, worker separation, hiring/training of new staff, and processing changes in placements. Indirect costs of services deal with the increased time spent in foster care by children, costs of recurrence of child abuse and neglect, and ultimately potential loss of funding (Annie E. Casey

Foundation, 2015; Casey Family Programs, 2017). Realizing that the increased turnover rates

among child welfare workers is problematic for children and families, as well as the entire state,

should raise the flag that more efforts need to be made when it comes to process of recruiting and

retaining child welfare workers. Addressing issues of turnover will put child welfare workers and

the system in a better position to effectively care for children and families.

Overview of Education

     Few studies conducted on child welfare workers look into the relationship between

education and job satisfaction. A dated study by Lieberman, Hornby, and Russell (1988) found

that child welfare workers with a masters in social work (MSW) felt more comfortable and

knowledgeable about their job in comparison to workers with a bachelors in a different major

than social work (as cited in Barth et.al, 2008). With the increased demand of child welfare

workers, the requirements on what the degree should be in has become more obscure. In some

states and agencies, child welfare workers are no longer required to obtain a degree in social

work but instead can be in a related field (Whitaker, 2012). Massachusetts is one of those states

(Social Work Guide, 2019). Several researchers (Mark & Wells, 2013;Whitaker, 2012) have

used the Lieberman, Hornby and Russell (1988) study to advocate for the continued presence of

university partnerships that allow child welfare workers to pursue higher education in order to do

their job more effectively. My literature review will go into detail on the positive impact this can

have for child welfare workers as well as for children and families.

Overview of Training

Title-IV-E and Title IV-E of the Social Security Act requires that states use federal funding for the continuing of education and training of social workers. Federal funding has decreased from 70% in the 1980's to 30%-50% in the last decade (Leung & Cheung, 2018). This shows the decreased importance placed on education and training programs for child welfare workers. Providing child welfare workers with the proper education and training will not only lead to less turnover, but will create a dedicated and educated workforce able to do their job of protecting the most vulnerable children and families in the child welfare system (Leung & Cheung, 2018). Recent research has also looked at the types of training that have been provided for child welfare workers and have noted the lack of training provided that address racial disparities among children who enter the child welfare system (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2011; Dettlaff & Rycraft, 2010; Mumpower, 2010). My literature review provides a deeper analysis on the importance of education and training efforts among child welfare workers as well as the types of education and training that aligns with the current reality of the child welfare system.

Overview of Organizational Environment

The child welfare system has been under harsh scrutiny in recent years leading to a stressful work environment. According to HeaJung & Hopkin's (2015) child welfare workers who work in a stressful work environment, have lower levels of organizational commitment. Recent research has found that "agencies with a more positive climate have higher job satisfaction and organizational commitment among workers, less turnover, better service quality, and more positive outcomes for children"(Glisson et al, 2012, p. 1). The increased amount of

stress due to high caseloads and workloads were among the many reasons why child welfare

workers felt their job was stressful (Glisson et al, 2012; HeaJung & Hopkins, 2015). While there

have been efforts to decrease caseloads, little attention has been given to addressing trauma

informed care and treating secondary traumatic stress among child welfare workers (Child

Welfare Information Gateway, 2015; Payne, 2014). States such as Texas and Tennessee have

recognized the need to focus on ways to make the child welfare workforce a "safe" place

(Vogus, 2016). While my literature review explores the different efforts geared toward the

reduction of workloads and caseloads, I also focus on the new initiative to create safe

environments that include focusing more on trauma informed care and addressing secondary

stress trauma among child welfare workers.

Literature Review

Several things are important when looking at the obstacles child welfare workers face

when it comes to working with children and families. In this present literature review, the role

child welfare workers play in the child welfare system will be explored. By looking at how the

current child welfare system came to be what it is today and the policy changes that have

occurred in the process, it will become clear that there needs to be a greater shift in policy to

focus on the structural and organizational needs child welfare workers lack. The literary review

will expand on the issues previously discussed in the areas of education, training, and safety

initiatives in both the larger child welfare workforce as well as a deeper look into the current

Massachusetts child welfare system. Past and current research will prove that focusing on

improving the workforce conditions of child welfare workers in this field will better the

outcomes of children and families.

History of Child Welfare

The era prior to 1875, is referred to as the era before organized child protection agencies

existed. While these agencies did not exist, cases of child abuse and neglect were brought to

supreme courts sporadically (Myers, 2008). In 1866, Massachusetts was one of the first states to

pass a law giving judge's permission to intervene when there were cases of suspected child abuse

and neglect by the parent (Myers, 2008). Between 1875 and 1962, the creation of

non-governmental child protection societies to protect children were created across the country.

 It was not until 1962, that child abuse became a national concern in the United States, resulting

in government agencies being created. Prior discussion of child abuse and neglect were almost

nonexistent, even in pediatric offices (Myers, 2008). After pediatric radiologist John Caffrey,

published a report describing the fractures of six young children, a growing concern over child

abuse and neglect came into the forefront, sparking the government to create government funded

child protective services (CPS), also known as the Department of Children and Families (DCF),

or Department of Social Services (DSS) (Myers, 2008). Congress made several changes to the

Social Security Act of 1962 and for the first time, identified child protective services as part of

public child welfare (Myers, 2008). The 1962 amendments "required states to pledge that by July

1, 1975, they would make child welfare services available statewide. This requirement fueled

expansion of government child-welfare services" (Myers, 2008, p.455). Tremendous progress

has occurred since 1962, however the continued expansion of child abuse and neglect cases have

left many agencies and child welfare workers needing more support.

Current Allocation of Funds

The U.S government influences child welfare agencies by providing the funding to states

to carry out the necessary services for children and families. There are three U.S laws that

influence the provision of child welfare services. The Child Abuse and Prevention Act

(CAPTA), the Social Security Act, and Title IV-B and Title IV-E of the social security act. The

recent passing of the Family First Prevention Services Act which focuses primarily on the latter

law (IV-E funds), has had mixed reviews on the impact it will have on children involved in the

system (Children's Defense Fund 2018; Leung & Cheung, 2018). While the act increases the

funding towards prevention services for children and families who are at risk of entering into

foster care, its focus on prevention leaves arguably too much flexibility for states to continue

funding children who are already in foster care or in out-of-home placements (Leung & Cheung,

2018). This ultimately puts in jeopardy children and families who are currently involved in the

child welfare system (Leung & Cheung, 2018). Its aim to allow states to be more flexible in

where they allot the funding makes it more difficult for states to prioritize things like workforce

development. As shown in **Figure 1** both Massachusetts and a majority of states in the U.S,

Figure 1

continue to prioritize funding for out-of-home placements (58% and 48 %) above other

initiatives including child protective services (10% and 15%) which include the child welfare

workforce (Child Trends, 2016). Researchers Ringel et al. (2017) have had trouble pointing to

the necessary changes in policy that need to occur in order to better the outcomes of children and

families who are in the system and instead have found that a package of policies need to be

changed in order to better serve this population. Public health professionals have found that

prioritizing both prevention and treatment improves the system on the inside and out allowing for

better outcomes for all children and families who come into contact with the child welfare

system and not only those who are at higher risk of being taken into out-of-home care services

(Ringel et al., 2017). With Title IV-E funding being the primary source of funding for child

welfare systems, scholars are hoping legislators focus on the possibility of reallocating federal

and state funds towards child welfare workforce improvements including educational initiatives,

trauma informed trainings, and creating a safety culture and environment, which we explore in

detail in this literature review (Leung & Cheung, 2018). Reallocating these funds for efforts

towards improving the child welfare workforce must not only be done in states like

Massachusetts, but also nationwide as shown by figure 1. While Massachusetts had a larger

percent of funds towards out-of-home placements (58 %,), compared to the U.S (48%), both

have focused on out-of-home placements as a top priority instead of child protective services

(Child Trends, 2016).

Bella Bond Case in Massachusetts

The child welfare system is constantly under scrutiny, especially after exposures of child

deaths are revealed to the public. In 2015, "Baby Doe" was found wrapped in a blanket in a

garbage bag in Massachusetts (Leblanc, 2015). Later identified as 2 year-old Bella Bond, she became the poster child for critics of the child welfare system. Many blamed the Massachusetts Department of Children and Families (DCF) for allowing the mother to have custody of Bella after she was reported twice for child abuse and neglect (Leblanc, 2015). Similar cases around the country have put the child welfare system in a corner, often leading to radical policy changes. While these unfortunate instances occur in many work settings the child welfare system "are unable as yet to take the same approach used by hospitals—fully examining internally what went wrong and creating a learning organization to learn from those mistakes. Instead, highly visible changes are made that have repercussions for staff at all levels" (Committee of Child Maltreatment Research, 2014, p.47). While many of the new protocols attempt to better serve children and families, they are often implemented with little to no support and are often a reactionary approach to the unfortunate cases like Bella Bond. These reactionary approaches are often a way to mask the underlying issues that child welfare workers face daily and do not fully examine the internal issues that led to these mistakes in the first place. Examining and fixing these issues can not happen overnight. The child welfare system needs to continuously provide proactive solutions that will work day by day to improve working conditions.

Massachusetts Child Welfare System

Shortly after the Bella Bond case, Massachusetts frontline child welfare workers called for reforms in the Department of Children and families (DCF) one of the leading child protection agencies in the U.S. Following large budget cuts and an increasing amount of child deaths under DCF supervision like Bella Bond, child welfare workers knew changes needed to be made (Moss, 2015). After collaborating with the Child Welfare League of America, a coalition of

private and public agencies, Massachusetts Governor Charlie Baker said, "reducing caseloads,

retaining and recruiting social workers and ensuring clear and concise policies for supervision

and case management are all necessary to ensuring the agency is able to focus on its primary

duty of keeping children safe" (Moss, 2015, p.1). However, Massachusetts has faced additional

challenges that have put them in the spotlight when it comes to child welfare reform. In 2017, an

audit released by state auditor Suzanne Bump, pointed to over 260 incidents of serious bodily

injury to children in the department of children and families (DCF) custody from 2014 to 2015

that were not reported (Fortier & Jones, 2017). **Figure 2** shows that there were 547 medical

incidents that were not reported by DCF. The audit pointed to several issues within the system

that made it difficult for front line workers to adequately do their job.

Figure 2

Serious Medical Incidents Involving Children in DCF Care

	Assault	Weapon	Drug Overdose or Poisoning	Suicide Attempt with Injury	Fire-Related Injury or Severe Burn	Bone Fracture	Total*
Not Reported to DCF	147	26	96	101	30	150	547
Vendor Major Incident Report†	10	2	2	25	0	12	44
51A or Institutional Abuse Report	8	0	2	14	0	4	26
	165	28	100	140	30	166	617

* The sum of the individual columns will not equal the Total column because there are incidents classified in multiple categories (e.g., assault with a weapon would be classified under both Assault and Weapon). The Total column represents unique incidents, which means that the same incident can only be counted once no matter how many categories it is found in.

† A vendor major incident report is a written report filed by a licensed individual (i.e., someone who has been approved by DCF to care for children in its custody) detailing an incident that occurred. Some examples of major incidents are incidents that require emergency room visits; suicide ideation or attempts that require medical attention; and injuries resulting from use of weapons.

These issues included strict time frames, and a lack of knowledge of what incidents needed to be

reported to the office of the child advocate (Fortier & Jones, 2017). The recommendations the

audit as well as the Child Welfare League of America proposed, included extensive training to

staff on identifying and investigating critical incidents involving children in the custody of DCF,

as well as an increased amount of child welfare workers in order to reduce caseload and reduce turnover (Fortier & Jones, 2017).

A Boston Globe newspaper article by Levenson (2018) found that after failing the state audit produced by Suzanne Bump, Governor Baker believed reducing the amount of workload child welfare workers had, would strengthen DCF and allow them to make more timely reports and investigations. In theory, these could have led to improvements for child welfare workers and for children involved with DCF, but this was not the case. Peter MacKinnon, president of Service Employees International Union Local 509, found 300 child welfare workers still having 22 cases on their caseload three years later (Levenson, 2018). The Child Welfare League of America recommends that all states maintain a caseload between 12 and 15 children per worker (Whitaker et al, 2004, p.18). With 12- 15 cases being the recommended case amount per worker, the current number is considered to be at a crisis level and further explains the need for policies to be implemented both nationally and in states such as Massachusetts so that overall improvements can occur. Governor Baker believed increasing staff would trickle down to reducing caseloads, however he failed to see how other factors, like increased turnover rates due to high levels of stress and lack of support, were still causing child welfare workers to have high caseloads and workloads. His focus on recruitment and not retention produced no significant changes.

Governor Baker's efforts towards providing more support for front line workers have not produced better outcomes for children and families in Massachusetts as expected. In Levenson's (2018) Boston Globe newspaper article Mary Collins, a professor of social welfare policy at Boston University, believed two years after these policies were implemented no significant

changes were seen (Levenson, 2018). Collins believed more investments needed to be put into

place in order for results to occur (Levenson, 2018). Union leader MacKinnon expressed concern

over the lack of data provided by Massachusetts agencies. He believed data was vital in

determining the actual impact of these policy initiatives. MacKinnon along with advocates and

state officials overrode a veto proposed by Baker to allow for more reporting by DCF when it

comes to basic outcome measures (Levenson, 2018). These outcomes measures will evaluate the

percentage of children reunited with families within 12 months, the percentage of children with

two or fewer placements in 12 months, and percentage of children hurt while under DCF

custody (Levenson, 2018). These outcome measures will allow the public to know how agencies

that are supposed to serve children and families like DCF are performing. While Baker believed

that these numbers would not show an accurate picture of the growth child welfare agencies have

experienced in recent years, this initiative will create more oversight on child welfare agencies

like DCF, which according to MacKinnon will be a necessary step in order to hold these

agencies accountable to produce changes (Levenson, 2018). As stated by Blome and Steib

(2007) "child welfare agencies are accountable to the community not only because they spend

local, state, and federal dollars, but also, most critically, because they are charged with protecting

vulnerable children from abuse and neglect." (p. 4). Blome and Steib (2007) recognize that

increased accountability might give child welfare workers the impression that they are being

scrutinized, as these "watchers" are added into the system. However, along with an increased

amount of funds to advance service delivery through a more stable workforce and staff

development, child welfare workers can see these "watchers" as advocates working alongside

them to improve the quality of services they provide to children and families (Blome and Steib,

2007). These advocates can range from court appointed special advocates (CASAs) to citizen

review panel volunteers (Bloom and Steib, 2007). Since the child welfare system is often

scrutinized from outsiders, these "watchers" will act as a liaison between child welfare workers

and the general public and work to push for more systematic reforms that support for child

welfare workers (Blome & Steib, 2007). By strengthening the child welfare workforce, increased

oversight and accountability will not harm workers, but instead give agencies measurable

outcomes to which they can utilize to continue to improve services and prevent cases like Bella

Bond from happening (Blome & Steib, 2007). While the lack of accountability in Massachusetts

has painted an unclear picture of the outcomes child welfare agencies have been producing in

recent years, states across the U.S along with Massachusetts continue to experience issues such

as high turnover rates that have negatively affected child welfare workers, children, and families

in the system (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2015).

Costs of Turnover

High turnover rates not only impact the population the child welfare system serves, but

also the entire system. As previously stated, high turnover rates produce direct and indirect costs

that affect the child welfare system, all which can lead to potential loss of funding (Annie E.

Casey Foundation, 2015). Child welfare workers choose to leave for a variety of reasons

including demanding caseloads, unsafety, traumatic stress, and scrutiny (National Child Welfare

Institute, 2018). **Figure 3** outlines some of those reasons by the amount of effect it has on their

choice to leave (Casey Family Programs, 2017). While caseload size and having a social work

degree was on the low effect side, stress and organizational commitment were among the top

reasons why workers choose to leave their agency according to a study conducted by Casey

Family Programs (2017). It is important to note that "high workloads that accompany high

caseloads have been associated with high turnover, given their impact on caseworkers' levels of

stress, emotional exhaustion, and job satisfaction"(Casey Family Programs, 2017, p.2).

Figure 3
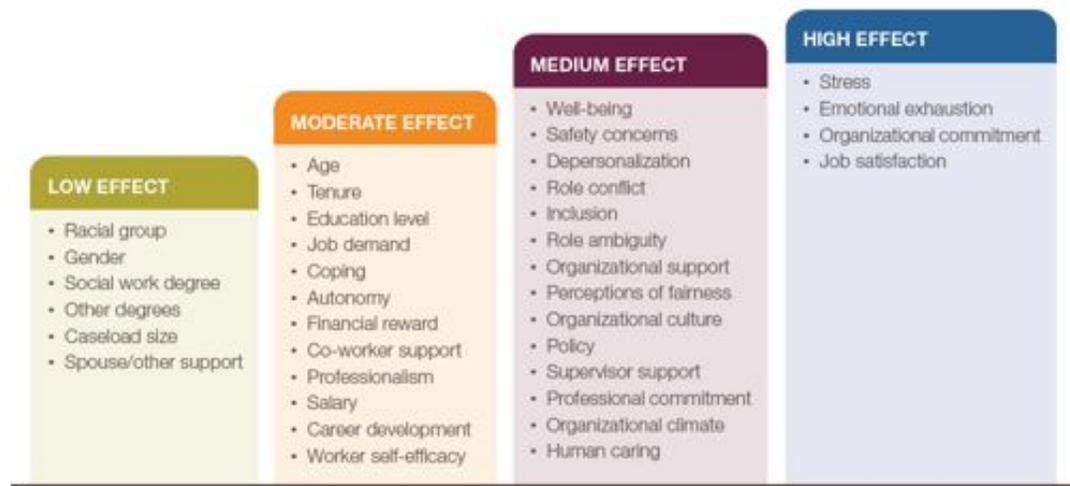
Source: Casey Family Programs, 2017

Reducing turnover rates among child welfare workers means providing high quality services for

children and families. This means timely investigations, which can be vital when a child is in

potential danger, more contact with children and families that can lead to more referrals and

support, and overall safety and well-being of staff (National Child Welfare Institute, 2018). The

lack of support in the child welfare system has led to large turnover rates that put children and

families at greater risk of falling victim to child abuse and neglect, and leaving families without

the necessary resources to keep their children safe (National Child Welfare Institute, 2018).

While children and families pay the largest cost of this turnover, so does the child welfare system

as whole. According to the nonprofit Casey Family Programs (2017), once a social worker leaves 30-200 percent of exiting employee's annual salary is lost due to the agency paying other employees overtime, and hiring and training new staff.

Figure 4 (National Child Welfare Institute, 2018) represents the estimated cost an agency loses each time a child welfare social workers leaves the agency (approximately $54, 000). Increased turnover rates put at risk children and families in the child welfare system and decreases the amount of funding the child welfare system can put into other areas of development such as education, training, and organizational safety initiatives. **Figure 5** (National Child Welfare Institute, 2018) shows the benefits that could be obtained if turnover rates were

Figure 4

TURNOVER IS COSTLY

Cost for each worker leaving an agency:

$54,000'

Source: National Child Welfare Institute, 2018

Figure 5

REDUCED TURNOVER MEANS

✓ Timely investigations
✓ More contacts/visits with children, families, and resource families
✓ Better service delivery
✓ Improved safety, permanency, and well-being

Source: National Child Welfare Institute, 2018

reduced. Overall, this will create consistent and timely services that will promote quality services and safety for everyone involved and could potentially allow for more funding to be shifted towards education, training, and organizational development initiatives.
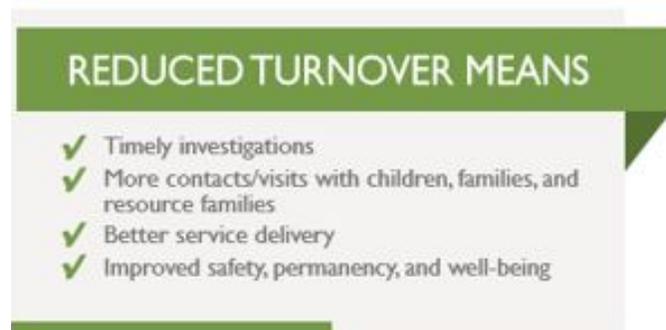
Turnover rates among states in the U.S have been increasingly high in the past years. According to Casey Family Programs (2017) child welfare turnover rates have been estimated to be 20–40 percent nationally. Casey Family Programs released a report with the turnover rates for

several states from 2016-2017 however, Massachusetts turnover rates were not included in Casey

Family Programs report. New Jersey had the lowest turnover rate among the 33 states in the

report with 6.97% (Casey Family Programs, 2017). Other neighboring Massachusetts states like

New York had a 30% turnover rate, while Pennsylvania had a 17% turnover rate (Casey Family

Programs, 2017). A 10% turnover rate is considered optimal for child welfare agencies (Child

Welfare League of America, 2017b). High turnover rates among several states in the U.S are one

of the indicators that the child welfare system needs to be looked at extensively. Finding the

main issues that are causing these turnover rates and finding solutions to lowering turnover rates

and increasing support for child welfare workers should be on the forefront of federal, state, and

local attention.

Child Welfare Education

Child welfare workers have been subject to rapid changes and scrutiny that have aided to

the de-professionalization and lack of respect towards the child welfare workforce. Whitaker

(2012) along with other researchers recognize issues within the child welfare workforce that

contribute to the de-professionalization of the child welfare system. These issues include large

caseloads and administrative burdens that result in high turnover rates (Children's Defense Fund,

2018; Sudol, 2009; Whitaker, 2012). An increased amount of administrative burdens including

high caseloads without the necessary support and education makes it hard for staff to remain in

these positions thus resulting in turnover rates increasing. Whitaker (2012) states that this has

been due to the concerns of not having an adequate supply of case workers, but also due to the

predictions of high demand and inability for schools of social work to provide enough graduates

for the field who have obtained their masters in social work. This has led many agencies to hire child welfare workers either with a bachelors in social work or in some cases without a degree altogether. In Massachusetts, "the majority of child welfare workers hold a bachelor's degree (52.3%) or a bachelor of social work degree (21.9%). Only 25% of child welfare workers hold a master's degree" (Child Welfare League of America, 2017b, p.4). With the high demand of child welfare workers and not enough workers with social work degrees states such as Massachusetts have less requirements for workers when it comes to obtaining a social work licensure. "According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), most social work positions require a bachelor's degree in social work. A bachelor's-level social work degree qualifies graduates to become licensed social workers. However, in Massachusetts, high school graduates with field experience can also qualify for licensure" (Social Work Guide, 2019, p.1). This in turn has created another profession of child welfare workers under the child welfare system that must be trained adequately in order to do their job. While these child welfare workers may not hold social workers degrees, they should still be provided with the necessary training an education that a social worker receives in order to do their job more effectively as well as more opportunities to continue their education.

University Partnerships. Recognizing the intersectionality of social work education and child welfare is valuable when trying to understand the training and education child welfare workers should have before entering the field. Leung & Cheng (2018) and Sudol (2009) are among researchers who pointed to the lack of education and training child welfare workers receive. The creation of university partnerships between child welfare agencies and universities seems to be the best solution to be able to provide child welfare workers with the opportunity to

continue their education and obtain their bachelors or masters in social work. Unfortunately, in a 2012 survey many states reported eliminating their Title IV-E partnership programs with universities (Social Work Policy Institute, 2012). The survey also showed that 70% of IV-E partnership programs either remained the same or decreased due to budget cuts (Social Work Policy Institute, 2012). According to Leung and Cheung (2018), it is imperative to continue to advocate for Title-IV-E education partnership programs. Their continued existence and expansion across all states will allow child welfare workers to receive both the proper training and education to do their job.

Thirteen university partnerships have established traineeships free of cost for child welfare workers to pursue their bachelors in social work or masters in social work (Dickinson and Fisher, 2015). These traineeships work collaboratively with child welfare agencies to produce a well-educated and trained workforce. Their curriculum focuses on evidence-based and trauma informed practices and allows social workers to continue their education while also remaining employed and gaining hands on experience. University of Connecticut and University of New Hampshire are two of the 13 existing universities with these partnerships (Dickinson and Fisher, 2015). The National Child Welfare Workforce institute awards each university with a grant that allows them to have this traineeship. Unfortunately, they limit the amount of trainees they accept yearly. In the school year 2018-2019, they allowed only five trainees (University Partnership Program, 2019).

The Social Work Policy Institute (2012) also believe that partnership programs if implemented correctly can have a significant impact on increasing retention and professionalism in the child welfare workforce. According to their policy brief "efforts should be made to

support and encourage rigorous, multi-site evaluation of Title IV-E educational partnerships to

better ascertain their impact on social work education, staff recruitment and retention, and child

welfare outcomes"(Social Work Policy Institute, 2012, p.2). A study on Texas child welfare

workers, found that child welfare workers who were able to obtain a bachelors or masters in

social work, produced lower turnover rates in the field. According to Patel, et al (2016) "turnover

in states that require a BSW or MSW for child welfare workers were found to have an average

8% lower turnover rate (15% vs. 23%) compared to states that allow an individual with any

bachelor's degree" (p.26). Similarly, Leung and Cheung (2018) found child welfare workers to

being able to manage stress more effectively in the workplace if they had a bachelors or masters

in social work.

Child Welfare Training

Funding that supports training for child welfare workers can come from a variety of

funding streams including Title- IV-E, and Title IV-B. Currently states can receive a 75 percent

match on state dollars spent on worker training. The matching process is complex because in

order to receive the match, a worker's caseload must be IV-E eligible. "For example, if 50

percent of a worker's foster care caseload is eligible for Title IV-E funding (due to the link to the

1996 AFDC cash assistance law), then only 50 percent of that workers training costs is eligible

for the 75 percent match" (Child Welfare League of America, 2016, p.1). This can make it

financially risky for states to continue to provide training for workers if they will not be federally

reimbursed through the matching initiative (Child Welfare League of America, 2016). According

to Jordan and Connelly (2016), "accessing these federal funds has created several challenges for states in the past. For example, leaders indicated that they do not have sufficient control over how to spend the federal money, and are unable to spend it in the way they deem best for their children, due to federal requirements"(p.4). Adequate trainings for child welfare workers in the field, despite their education and experience, is an important tool for workers to learn about their role and position and the agency where they will be working in. This knowledge should not be limited because of a lack of funding. As noted by the Administration for Children and Families (ACF), "When workers have the opportunity to build skills and improve their effectiveness, they are more likely to experience job satisfaction and stay committed to their work" (Payne, 2014, pg.8).

While continued training is critical for child welfare workers, the types of trainings that they receive is also important to note. As previously stated child welfare workers only receive training provided for programs that are directly related to Title IV-E programs and therefore do not include training to treat family and child behavioral issues, and conducting child abuse and neglect investigations (Leung and Cheung, 2018). Since these trainings are critical for child welfare workers to do their job, it is alarming that these trainings are not provided. It also explains why there is a large turnover rate among trainees (Leung and Cheung, 2018). If trainees are not being given the proper training, they will not feel ready to start their career. Providing relevant trainings for trainees in the start of their career produces a committed and educated staff.

New Jersey's Department of Children and Families (DCF), implemented a university-agency partnership program aimed at increasing staff training and professional development. This partnership includes "the Office of Training and Professional Development;

the Institute for Families at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey; and Stockton

University's Child Welfare Education Institute" (Munson, 2016, p.38). These investments

include a professional development center, university-agency training partnership, and certificate

programs that allow for child welfare workers to gain credits towards their education (Munson,

2016). The program offers "classroom and online courses meet the critical needs of the

workforce. Specialized topics on issues influencing the safety and well-being of

children—including domestic violence, substance abuse, and mental illness—are a major

emphasis"(Munson, 2016, p.39). Efforts that support child welfare workers like these

partnerships, have created less turnover rates in the New Jersey's DCF (Casey Family Programs,

2017). Along with trainings that address issues of safety and well-being, New Jersey's DCF has

also implemented trainings that address racial disparities and strengthen the cultural competence

of child welfare workers (Munson, 2016).

   Racial Disparities Training. As demographics in the U.S continue to change, the racial

disproportionality of children who enter the child welfare system is an issue that continues to

arise on a national level; however, the populations that they affect are based on the state as well

as smaller communities. While nationally African American children experience higher amounts

of abuse, in Massachusetts, White and Hispanic children are the highest amount of children who

are victims of abuse and thus enter the child welfare system (Child Welfare League of America,

2017b). This is an important distinction to make because, while one community will have more

training that addresses the disparity in African American children entering the system, other

states such as Massachusetts will have to look at why white and Hispanic children are entering

the system at higher rates (Child Welfare League of America, 2017b). It is important that child

welfare workers receive training related to race and culture because recognizing that these

disproportionalities and disparities exist, will allow them to be more aware and respond

appropriately to these cases without bias. According to Lancaster and Fong (2015), "training for

child welfare staff could include information about disproportionality and disparity, institutional

racism, culturally competent practice with specific cultural groups, and identifying personal

biases and their impact. While training is a key first step to enhanced practice by agency staff, it

is also important to support transfer of learning to ensure staff apply the concepts from the

training to their jobs" (as cited in Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2016b, p.15). Lancaster

and Fong (2015) point to not only the importance of training, but also the importance of teaching

child welfare workers how to use this training in their everyday interactions. By receiving this

training, child welfare workers will be able to look at how culture plays a large role in

disciplining and how that might look for different families. By being knowledgeable of these

differences, child welfare workers will be better equipped to make better judgments on how to

address parents when it comes to how they discipline their children, something that can be

different depending on a family's race or culture (Lancaster and Fong, 2015).

Organizational and Safety Efforts

    High Caseloads and Workloads. The child welfare workforce often experience

moments of harm both internally and externally. Internally, the lack of funds and continued

budget cuts make it harder for child welfare workers to do their job to the best of their ability.

Issues such as increased workloads and caseloads all inflict harm to workers on a daily basis.

Past efforts to address these issues have focused on increasing staff numbers through purely

recruiting methods, instead of finding the root cause of the problem, which could lead to

retention (Patel et al, 2017). According to a study by Bernal (2017), families involved in the

child welfare system believed the highest systematic barrier to hinder their relationship with their

child welfare worker was their demanding caseloads. The recruitment and retention of child

welfare workers should be one of the first steps for reducing workloads and caseloads. High

turnover rates in the child welfare workforce are the root cause of workers having to take on

more cases than they are initially given. The Texas Department of Family Protective Services

implemented strategies that tackled lowering caseloads by appropriating existing funding to

increase salary, hire over 800 new workers across the state, and saw a significant decrease in

turnover, 25.4 percent to 18.4 percent. (Casey Family Programs, 2018). While this was able to be

done by increasing salaries, something not all states have the power to do immediately, other

states have found other ways to reduce workloads and caseloads that could be replicated. These

strategies could also be more realistic especially for states that do not see an increase in funding

in the near future.

In 2010, New Hampshire Division of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF)

implemented telework units that allow workers to have more autonomy and work primarily from

home (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2016a). Child welfare workers who are a part of

these units must have at least 1 year of experience as a social worker while supervisors must

have 5 years in a related field and 3 years of supervisory experience (Child Welfare Information

Gateway, 2016a). Workers are required to check in with supervisors various times throughout

the day and after home visits. Since 2010, the New Hampshire's DCYF have seen positive

results for employees that include "better balance of field time and paperwork, fewer

distractions, increased communication with the supervisor, an increased sense of team membership, less travel in some cases, greater job satisfaction, increased efficiency, and lower turnover" (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2016a, p.11). With the increase use of technology in the field, workers are able to complete work from anywhere often reducing their workload while also allowing them to be able to spend more time with families (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2016a). Increased autonomy and effective uses of emerging technology are some of the ways to decrease stress among child welfare workers.

New Jersey's Department of Children and Families have taken proactive steps to ensure they continue to hire well-qualified candidates in reasonable time frames in an effort to maintain caseload standards and sizes. Their process includes a Job Fest where 25-35 candidates, who have been pre-screened and pre-qualified, get an overview of the agency, the job, and hiring process. They complete a job interview, panel interview, and submit writing samples and application paperwork (See Appendix D). After "candidates that successfully complete the Job Fest and background check processes are added to a hiring matrix distributed weekly to local offices throughout the state. Several hundred candidates are on the matrix at any given time, and each stays on for 18 months" (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2016a, p.12). This allows agencies to be able to fill positions in a timely basis without putting at risk current child welfare workers. New Jersey's efforts to obtain a well-educated workforce has resulted in New Jersey's Department of Children Families having one of the lowest turnover rates(6.97%) in the U.S (Munson, 2016). This also allows them to be able to hire highly qualified workers. Workload and caseload management is an important aspect of helping child welfare workers manage their stress and creating a better work environment. As there continues to be an increase in workload

and caseloads in various states, these examples should be considered as ways to reduce some of these burdens. This would reduce the amount of money spent on turnover.

Promoting Safety Culture. Externally, criticism and a lack of understanding of these issues by outside forces create stress that often bears down on child welfare workers (Vogus et al, 2016). Public perceptions of the child welfare system have played a major role in the way child welfare workers perceive their own jobs (Auerbach et al, 2014). The increased amount of child fatalities and maltreatment have worked to discredit the role of child welfare systems as a child protection agency (Auerbach et al, 2014). Studies have found that the stigma associated with being a child welfare social worker negatively affects their work performance. One study found that " workers feel like their work is not valued by the external environment, and that in turn agency administrators could try to work with the media and government to actively improve negative misperceptions about the importance of child welfare work in the community"(Auerbach et al, 2014, p.6). Child fatalities have often been followed by rapid changes in the child welfare system due to the public scrutiny and demand for a response as seen in Massachusetts Bella Bond case (Committee of Child Maltreatment Research, 2014; Leblanc, 2015). A study conducted by Cooper (2005) found that "increased verbal support of workers by administrators and sufficient funding to realize the stated objectives of various programs would accomplish more toward advancing the quality of service than the current superfluous zeal with which we concern ourselves toward assessing blame"(p.14). All these factors contribute to the child welfare workforce becoming an unsafe place for staff. To combat this reality, states such as Texas and Tennessee have pushed efforts to create a safety culture that addresses both safety organizing and safety recognition (Vogus et al, 2016). Texas and Tennessee realized that

addressing the root causes of these problems and teaching child welfare workers how to seek the

necessary support they need, will produce better outcomes and increase retention ultimately

reducing the amount of caseloads each worker has at a given time. In order to combat the

scrutiny the child welfare system constantly face, it is obvious that changes need to be made to

create an environment where this stigma does not affect the daily work child welfare workers do.

Trauma Informed Culture. Creating a safety culture among child welfare workers

means addressing the reality that many children and families who enter the system enter with

underlying traumas and needs that child welfare workers need to be aware of and educated on, in

order to respond appropriately. The National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN) adopted

the following definition of a trauma informed system,

> A trauma-informed child- and family-service system is one in which all parties involved
>
> recognize and respond to the impact of traumatic stress on those who have contact with
>
> the system, including children, caregivers, and service providers. Programs and agencies
>
> within such a system infuse and sustain trauma awareness, knowledge, and skills into
>
> their organizational cultures, practices, and policies. They act in collaboration with all
>
> those who are involved with the child, using the best available science, to facilitate and
>
> support the recovery and resiliency of the child and family (Child Welfare Information
>
> Gateway, 2015.p. 3).

Researchers Strand and Popescu (2018) stated in their article "An effective pedagogy for child

welfare education" that child welfare workers do not only have to be properly trained in order to

work in this field, but must also be trauma informed. This needs to come with the training and

education workers receive if they attend a social work degree program, but also once they enter the child welfare system (Strand & Popescu, 2018). Training child welfare workers to be trauma informed needs to occur in early stages of training and must also be accompanied by ways to recognize and treat secondary traumatic stress that workers may began to feel themselves.

Research towards creating a trauma informed child welfare system has been limited, however many agencies including the Children's Bureau, who were among the first to implement this practice, have proposed ways for other departments to adapt these approaches (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2015). Some of the service improvements they suggest are "more children receiving the trauma screening, assessment, and evidence-based treatment" (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2015, p.3) Promoting these services will reduce the amount of children requiring crisis services, fewer foster care disruptions and an overall healthier work environment for child welfare workers (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2015). They also stress the importance of collaboration between different child welfare agencies that the child and family might be involved with. As previously stated, there exists many stakeholders when it comes to ensuring the well- being of children and families and being able to collaborate to better meet the needs of children and families should be important. "Enhancing communication, planning and working toward joint goals, sharing robust data about the families they serve, and strategically blending or braiding are all ways agencies can collaborate to better serve children and families"(Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2015, p.5). Establishing a trauma informed work environment also includes addressing the secondary trauma child welfare workers experience.

Secondary Stress Trauma. Child welfare workers are constantly facing difficult decisions, at moment's life and death, which make their job incredibly difficult. In some cases, this can cause them to experience secondary traumatic stress (STS). It is important to understand that child welfare workers perform similar duties as first responder's emergency personnel and because of this should receive the same support (Payne, 2014). New Jersey's DCF understands the similarity of trauma that child welfare workers face and decided to create a "Worker2Worker" confidential peer counseling support hotline similar to the ones created for police officers (Munson, 2016). This helps child welfare workers who " require peer support to normalize issues and challenges by talking to someone with shared lived experience" (Munson, 2016, p.37). Child welfare workers who are constantly exposed to the traumatic events children and families they serve can begin to develop STS that often can lead to excessive burnout and an increase in turnover rates (Payne, 2014). According to the National Child Welfare Workforce Institute, agencies can create a trauma support position that is able to coordinate trauma education and services for all staff including trainees who enter the field (National Child Welfare Workforce Institute, 2011). It is important for agencies to address the impact STS can have on workers and be able to provide them with tools to address them.

    A study conducted in 2015 found that 26% to 35% percent of child welfare workers reported experiencing symptoms of secondary trauma directly related to their work (House Bill 17-283, 2017). In response to the high levels of STS child welfare workers were experiencing, Colorado enacted a bill that would create a resiliency task force aimed at examining the causes and effects of STS. Members of the task force represented the larger community and ranged from child advocacy members to law enforcement (Resiliency Task Force, 2017). They came up with

a list of recommendations including providing more opportunities for reflection and mindfulness activities as well as promoting a safety culture in the work environment. They also recommended for training on trauma informed care and the hiring and retention of more child welfare workers with a bachelors or masters in social work (Resiliency Task Force, 2017). Unfortunately, in September 2018, the bill was repealed and the task force no longer exists (Resiliency Task Force Report, 2017). Creating and maintaining these groups would help promote a trauma informed environment and allow for better outcomes. It is important for child welfare agencies to address the high levels of STS child welfare workers are experiencing and coming up with recommendations that would be able to be applied in their agencies on a day to day basis. Creating a task force that focuses solely on these issues is a first step.

Recommendations

In order to create an environment conducive to the goals of the child welfare system, which is to protect the most vulnerable children and families, there needs to be changes that directly address the issues of child welfare workers are constantly battling. These include high turnover rates, the lack of education and training provided, and the stressful and traumatic work culture and environment child welfare workers work in. We have explored the extent of these issues and the possible changes that need to be addressed in order for child welfare workers to be able to meet the needs of children and families. The following recommendations outline these changes and address both federal and state changes that need to occur to better support child welfare workers and establish an effective child welfare workforce.

Policy Recommendations

Family First Prevention Services Act. With the recent changes in funding that focus on the Family First Prevention Services Act, it is possible that IV-E funding will limit the amount of funds that are directed to educating and training child welfare workers (Children's Defense Fund 2018; Leung and Cheung, 2018). While prevention services are important for children and families, the child welfare system has a large number of children and families who are in the currently in the system and deserve the best support. In order to support child welfare workers, the Family First Prevention Services Act should extend its reach and include a subtitle focused towards workforce development efforts something they currently do not have (Children's Defense Fund, 2018).

Title IV-E and IV-B Changes (Increase, Flexibility and Reallocation). As previously discussed states fund child welfare services majorly through state and local funds and primarily focus on funding efforts towards out-of-home placements. By increasing the amount of federal funds states receive from both IV-E and IV-B policies, states will be able to fund programs and services aimed at creating an effective child welfare workforce. Through increasing university partnership funds, expanding training on trauma and secondary trauma informed care, racial disparity training and efforts towards creating a safe organizational environment the well- being and safety for child welfare workers will improve tremendously. While increased funding for states, especially in low receiving states such as Massachusetts, who were among the top three states to receive the lowest amount of federal funding for child welfare services, it is recommended that states reallocate current funds to support services directly aimed at servicing child welfare workers (Rosinsky and Williams, 2016 and Leung and Cheung, 2018). It is also important that states receive more flexibility on how they can use federal funding through

lessening the strict guidelines for training reimbursement under the current matching program (Jordan and Connelly, 2016).

Accountability. Along with these changes all states should have to report on how the funds are being distributed among the initiatives I will further outline in these recommendations and how they are being implemented in the daily work of child welfare workers. As previously mentioned by Blome and Steib (2007) increased accountability will not harm workers but instead allow for agencies to measure the outcomes of some of these efforts and then improve on them. As previously stated Massachusetts excluded many basic outcome measures in reports that could have helped agencies get a better idea of how to support child welfare workers (Levenson, 2018). Collecting and sharing data can often seem like an extra task for child welfare workers; however it should not be presented this way. It is important to make date entry convenient and useful for child welfare workers. Colorado created focus groups that allowed for workers to determine what data would be valuable for them to keep and what data they did not need as a form to reduce workload (Taylor et al. 2010). By demanding that states be accountable for not only how the funds are reallocated, but also what the outcomes are, the child welfare system will move in the right direction. See Appendix C for a graphic detailing the phases of accountability.

Education and Training of Child Welfare Workforce

Educational and training recommendations are trifold in that they address two large components of child welfare workforce. One, the ongoing training that child welfare workers should receive and two, the access to higher education among agencies. While increasing federal funds towards these initiatives would ideally be most beneficial to states, they can start by

re-allocating federal funds towards education and training for child welfare workers. This will

help them continue to develop the skills necessary to provide the best service to children and

families.

Education. Increasing the existence of university partnerships between child welfare

agencies and universities will allow for child welfare works to continue their education and gain

skills that will strengthen their role in the system and lead to less turnover. Currently only

thirteen university partnerships offer the ability for child welfare workers to get their bachelors in

social work or masters in social work free of cost. While these partnerships exist, they also admit

very few students each year (University Partnership Program, 2019). In order for university

partnerships to be successful, not only do they need to expand to various states, including

Massachusetts, but they also need additional funding to support an increase amount of students

in their programs. Creating more and expanding funding on existing partnership programs will

strengthen the child welfare workforce and create better outcomes for the children and families

the system serves (Wilson, 2014). It will also increase job satisfaction among child welfare

workers which will decrease turnover (Lieberman,et al, 1988)

Trainings. Advocating for continued training opportunities for child welfare workers

should not be as difficult as it is. With the current matching program under Title IV-E, not all

trainings including trainings on how to treat family and child behavioral issues, and conducting

child abuse and neglect investigations are offered to child welfare workers (Leung and Cheung,

2018). While all child welfare workers should receive this training, trainees who enter the field

should also be offered these trainings as part of their onboarding process. By not giving these

trainings especially to new employees, there will continue to be higher turnover rates for both

current workers and trainees (Casey Family Programs, 2017). Part of the reason why

Massachusetts failed the state audit ran by Suzanne Bump was because child welfare workers did

not have the knowledge of what incidents needed to be reported to the office of the child

advocate (Fortier & Jones, 2017). Lastly, increasing university-agency programs efforts that

allow for child welfare workers to complete trainings in a university setting could also be

impactful and help states reduce turnover rates (Munson, 2016).

Racial Disparities Trainings. Nationally there continues to be a change in the

population of children and families who enter the child welfare system. For child welfare

workers to be able to do their job adequately it is imperative that child welfare workers receive

trainings that appropriately address racial disparities in the child welfare system (Lancaster and

Fong, 2015). Racial inequalities in the child welfare system affect every process of the system

including investigations, reporting, and out-of-home placements (See Appendix B). The ways

these racial disparities manifest can be different depending on states and even smaller

communities so trainings offered to child welfare workers should be specific to each community

and state. As previously mentioned, while nationally African American children have higher

rates of reports for abuse, in Massachusetts White and Hispanic children are reported for abuse

more often (Child Welfare League of America, 2017b). Trainings implemented on racial

disparities in the system need to discuss both national and local trends as a way to educate child

welfare workers and reduce racial bias that can lead to child welfare workers making bad

decisions.

Organizational and Safety

   High Caseloads and Workloads. States across the country have started to use strategies

that have proven to effectively reduce turnover rates as well as help child welfare workers

manage caseloads and workloads. New Hampshire, has focused on providing social workers with

an increased amount of autonomy and use of telework to do their job. It has created "positive

results for employees include a better balance of field time and paperwork, fewer distractions,

increased communication with the supervisor, an increased sense of team membership, less

travel in some cases, greater job satisfaction, increased efficiency, and lower turnover" (Child

Welfare Information Gateway, 2016a). New Jersey has implemented a streamlined process for

hiring with the inclusion of a Job fest in order to maintain caseload and workload sizes at a

standard level (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2016a). Unfortunately, innovative ways to

tackle these issues have been created in silos and have been different from state to state. These

examples have proved to be effective for these states and should be considered by other states.

Massachusetts used hiring more staff as a means to reduce workload and caseload, and were not

successful as caseworkers continued to have large caseloads years later (Levenson, 2018).

Recruiting and increasing staff numbers was a quick and easy attempt to mask the underlying

stressors that affect the child welfare workforce, but more needs to be done to retain child

welfare workers.

   Promoting Safety Culture. Child welfare workers face external and internal stressors

that make their job extremely difficult. Factors such as heavy workload and caseloads, and lack

of education and training negatively impact child welfare workers, and produce symptoms of

burnout that lead to high turnover rates. Few agencies have looked for ways to address these issues through an increased focus on increasing morale and engaging workers in the workplace through initiatives that focus on changing attitudes and behaviors. Texas and Tennessee have implemented a safety culture initiative in order to combat some of the challenges faced by child welfare workers. Safety culture is characterized as a system of organizational values, attitudes, and behaviors that support a safe and engaged workforce (Vogus et al, 2016). Promoting a safety culture in organizations, such as in the child welfare workforce, means establishing new ways of thinking that do not put blame on workers for mistakes and accepts that risk is always emerging (Vogus et al, 2016). It allows for child welfare workers to value and use open communication as a way to continuously learn and improve. While states like Texas and Tennessee have seen the importance of creating safety cultures, these changes have yet to be adopted by other states including Massachusetts.

Trauma Informed. Producing a properly trauma informed workforce is essentially one of the ways to ensure and promote a safe work environment. Recognizing and addressing the impact that trauma has on children and families is the first step. Child welfare workers must be adequately trained on the importance of recognizing trauma and how to use resiliency efforts to help children and families (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2015). Part of adapting this resiliency stance is being able to collaborate with other agencies that the child and family are a involved with to be able to collectively support them (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2015). The ongoing trainings and education around trauma informed practices should be continuously present for child welfare workers.

Secondary Traumatic Stress. Addressing and finding solutions to the increased levels of STS's that child welfare workers experience is another way the child welfare workforce will promote a safe work culture and environment. Creating and maintaining a resiliency task force like the one in Colorado could be a first step for many child welfare agencies to begin to address these issues (Resiliency Task Force Report, 2017). Since every state and city is different, it is important that these task forces are representative of community members especially those who are most affected (Resiliency Task Force Report, 2017). Other efforts such as creating a peer support hotline for staff to be able to communicate with each other can be helpful especially for staff who are more resistant to openly addressing issues regarding their own trauma (Munson, 2016). Addressing and treating the effects of STS will help create an environment of resiliency and safety that is necessary for child welfare workers to be surrounded by. Creating a safety environment is a vital step in providing child welfare workers with a place for growth and development.

Conclusion

A qualified and well-trained child welfare workforce can not be accomplished without the proper support. As the child welfare system remains overlooked, child welfare workers along with children and families are at risk. In order to provide quality services that children and families deserve, the needs of child welfare workers need to be addressed both on the federal and state level. Child welfare workers need to be supported enough to be able to form deep and valuable relationships with the children and families they serve. Cultivating this relationship will lead to better outcomes for all parties involved; however as demonstrated in this capstone

support for changes in the child welfare workforce need to be made a priority. For these

recommendations to have a lasting impact on the child welfare workforce, they must be

intentional and implemented daily and with the overall mission in mind; which is to strengthen

families and keep children safe.

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APPENDIX A

Source: National Association of Social Workers, 2015

The figure above shows how the increasing demands in the workplace have overwhelmingly

affected child welfare workers and created symptoms of burnout and large sentiments of workers

wanting to leave their jobs. This continued dissatisfaction create harmful working conditions but

also alarming consequences for the children and families. As the figure states it is important to

look at how the stressors child welfare social workers face represent the bigger picture meaning

the child welfare system as a whole and its impact on this system.

APPENDIX B

Source: National Child Welfare Workforce Institute, 2017

As shown in figure above children and families of color continue to be discriminated against when it comes to many aspects of the child welfare system. As shown in the image they experience higher amounts of reporting as well as an increase in out- of -home placements. This drastic change has brought about many fixed feelings about what will happen to the child welfare system. Understanding the racial inequality that exists in the child welfare system should be addressed locally be each state.

APPENDIX C

Figure 1: Phases of Accountability
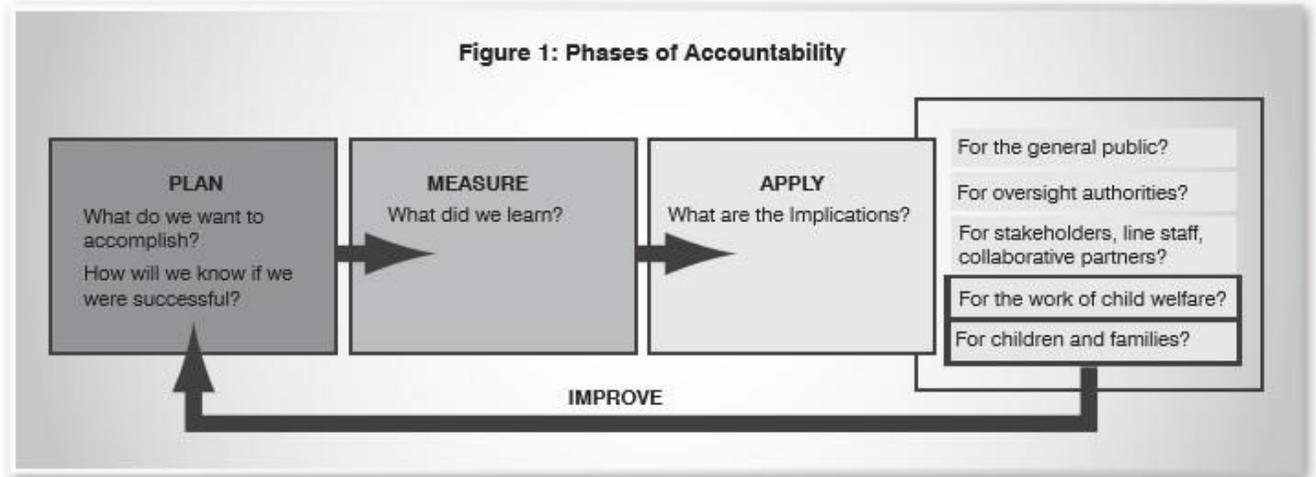
Source: Taylor, P., Harrington, P., & Zajac, J. (2010)

APPENDIX D

TABLE 10: JOB FEST PROCESS	
Section	**Steps**
General Overview	1. Overview of Division of Child Protection and Permanency (DCP&P) and role of the FSST 2. A twenty-minute video on DCP&P 3. Instructions for completing the pre-employment forms/paperwork 4. Overview of the hiring process

Initial Interview	1. Each candidate is interviewed by a panel of two interviewers
	2. Each Job Fest has nine to thirteen interview panels
	3. Interview questions for the most part are scenario-based and designed to assess the following skills:
	    a. Judgment/Decision Making
	    b. Oral Communication
	    c. Problem Analysis
	    d. Interpersonal Responsiveness
	    e. Organization
	    f. Time Management

Writing Sample	1. Each candidate participates in a ten-minute writing sample 2. The writing sample is evaluated to determine if it is relevant, coherent, in a narrative format, and reflects proper spelling/grammar/punctuation

Credential/ Paperwork Checkout	1. Each candidate meets with an HR representative to review and confirm that all forms are completed accurately, including:
	    a. Review employment application for completeness
	    b. Review and verify documents (valid driver's license, social security card, college transcript, written references)
	    c. Ensure candidate signs necessary releases, consents, and affidavits
	    d. Advise candidate of any outstanding documentation needed to complete the application process