



BPC Child Welfare Initiative – A Shared Vision for Child Welfare

Historically, policies that address how to protect children from, and respond to, cases of abuse and neglect have been amongst the most bipartisan issues among policymakers. This long legacy of bipartisanship has led to seminal reforms that established federal-state programs such as the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act, Adoption and Safe Families Act, John H. Chafee Foster Care for Successful Transition to Adulthood, Family First Prevention and Services Act, and others.

Despite areas of progress, many troubling outcomes persist for children and families involved in child welfare. There are growing concerns that our nation's child welfare system is failing to deliver on its core mission of ensuring child safety, permanency and well-being. Today, the path forward is unclear. There is significant disagreement about what's wrong with the safety net system and/or what is needed to remedy its shortcomings. Contributing to the lack of consensus are different underlying views about the appropriate role of government in child protection.

In addition, the country's current ideological divisions are likely affecting discussions on how to address the failings of the child welfare system. This is seen in competing proposals to reform the system and the different understanding of the evidence or reliance on different sources of information.

The Bipartisan Policy Center (BPC) is launching a Child Welfare Initiative to examine the policy landscape and elevate and capitalize on the traditional bipartisan support for child welfare issues.

Initial Scoping Phase

To help develop a path forward that supports system improvement and transformation efforts, the Initiative will begin by soliciting input from a diverse set of stakeholders and analyzing data and evidence from numerous sources. The scoping stage is critical to check our preconceived ideas, understand the diversity in perspectives and opinions, compile evidence that further clarifies the nature and scope of the problem, and help to prioritize the opportunities for change. It is anticipated that scoping will be completed in 2023. Planned activities include:

- **Stakeholder engagement:** Stakeholder outreach is an essential ingredient of every BPC project. Initially, stakeholder engagement provides a better understanding of the landscape and perspectives on the challenges, and helps to define the need for change. Outreach will focus on learning from state/local/tribal system leaders, local social service providers, individuals with direct experience with the system and its services, religious and community leaders, the donor community, and local, state, and federal policy makers.
- **Community engagement:** Children and families live, and child welfare systems operate, in communities. Understanding how those closest to the problem affect opinions about how the government should protect children and strengthen families is critical in designing a shared vision for child welfare.



- **Policy analysis:** The initiative will review existing and proposed child welfare policies to better understand the diversity in approaches being taken in different states and communities and the factors that influence the policy approaches selected.
- **Research synthesis:** The Initiative must be grounded in objective and credible evidence that helps define the nature and scope of the challenges we are seeking to address. We will compile and synthesize available data and research, while clearly identifying where evidence is lacking, conflicting and/or highly dependent on local context.
- **Public Polling:** Prior polling has clearly demonstrated that keeping children safe from abuse and neglect is a high and shared priority. Yet, there is very little information about how the public views the appropriate role of government in protecting children while simultaneously respecting the rights of parents to raise children without undue government interference.
- **Media Scan:** Public opinion as well as the perspectives of decision makers are influenced by what they hear and read. It is critical that we understand how the challenges of child welfare are messaged in order to craft a communication strategy that can support a shared vision built on common values.

Information collected during the initial scoping will help identify common ground and inform the path forward to advancing policy solutions that enable child welfare to better serve children and families. BPC is committed to identifying evidence-based policies that can improve the outcomes of children and families **and** garner bipartisan support. BPC will provide a forum for ongoing dialogue, design and execute a communications and outreach strategy to educate decisionmakers, recruit influential champions and build the diverse coalition required to advance and implement needed reforms.

Want more information or to provide input:

Contact: Lisel Loy (Loy@bipartisanpolicy.org) or Rob Geen (Rob@CWPolicy.com)