

Press Release

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THE DYFS REFORM PLAN TARGETS PREVENTION

Advocates for children throughout New Jersey are digesting the 190-page report on restructuring the child welfare system in New Jersey released by the Department of Human Services on February 18. The plan has its supporters and detractors, but the New Jersey chapter of Prevent Child Abuse – America is looking at one issue very closely - what the plan says about prevention.

“The DYFS reform plan is an ambitious effort to reform the system for managing cases of child abuse and neglect, and for the first time brings a stated focus on prevention services”, said Janet Rosenzweig, Executive Director of Prevent Child Abuse – New Jersey. “It does a particularly good job articulating issues of secondary prevention, which means providing supportive services to people who have identified risk factors like homelessness and addiction” said Rosenzweig, “and we applaud those efforts”. One secondary prevention program slated for expansion in the plan is the Healthy Families America Home visiting program, which currently serves over 1,000 families each year with trained home visitors supporting new parents. The report states that this services will be provided to 1,000 additional families enrolled in public assistance programs.

While the lawsuit which lead to this reorganization plan did not require a focus on prevention, members of the various community groups who provided input to the plan kept the issue front and center.

“While we all know the emotional and social costs of child abuse and neglect are staggering, so is the financial cost. The DYFS budget alone is over \$500 million; when you add law enforcement, courts medical and mental health costs we exceed a billion dollars” said Rosenzweig. This figure comports with an estimate that puts the cost nationally at \$94 billion.

The plan does not have a focus on primary prevention, which means providing education and support to families throughout a community, even if there are no obvious risk factors. “Prevent Child Abuse - New Jersey will continue to take the lead in this area, offering speakers and material from our Parent Education Resource Center to communities throughout the state.”

Prevent Child Abuse - New Jersey is a statewide, non-profit agency that has been pursuing the mission of working to eliminate the abuse and neglect of children in all forms . 2004 marks the 25th year of service to New Jersey,

For more information, please call 1-800-CHILDREN or 732-246-8060 or visit us on the web at www.preventchildabusej.org

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