



## TANF & Child Welfare Partnering for Prevention: WEST VIRGINIA'S SITE JOURNEY

*The Administration for Children and Families' Office of Family Assistance convened the Families Are Stronger Together Learning Community (FAST-LC) in partnership with the Children's Bureau to support eight States and two Tribes in forming partnerships between Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and child welfare programs focused on preventing families' involvement in the child welfare system. The FAST-LC took place between September 2023 and September 2024.*

### Motivation for Change

West Virginia has led the nation in the number of children removed from their families per capita for several years. This statistic, along with others, created momentum in the state to prioritize prevention services for families and help them avoid involvement with the child welfare system. TANF and child welfare leaders in West Virginia sought to capitalize on this momentum by strengthening the coordination between the Bureaus for Family Assistance and Social Services. Ultimately, West Virginia's goal was to increase the availability of family support services to families and connect families to "the right resources at the right time."

### Partnership Innovations

West Virginia's work to strengthen the partnership between TANF and Child Welfare focused on developing a collective prevention vision and formalizing ways of working with staff to bring their vision to life. The team's vision was to create a strong and integrated support system that addresses the economic and concrete needs of families in West Virginia, thereby preventing involvement in the child welfare system. The team convened a Steering Committee of leaders from across relevant agencies to support this work, including Cabinet Secretary Cynthia Persily, PhD.

To achieve its vision, the West Virginia team created individual workgroups. The workgroups focused on a stakeholder education campaign, the integration of family support services into the Child Protective Services' differential response framework, the enhancement of Title IV-E reimbursable service delivery, and closer case coordination and data sharing between the Bureaus for Family Assistance and Social Services.

### Prevention Innovations

As of September 2024, the workgroups are designing and implementing several specific strategies in service of West Virginia's overall prevention vision:

### About West Virginia

The West Virginia Department of Human Services' mission is to promote a thriving and healthy West Virginia through providing access to critical health care, essential social services and benefits, and trusted information, with a special emphasis on vulnerable populations. The Department houses the Bureaus for Family Assistance and Social Services. The former houses the state's TANF program, and the latter houses the Child Support program. The two bureaus share a commitment to strengthening families and preventing the factors that may contribute to child abuse and neglect.

According to U.S. Census Bureau data, West Virginia's estimated population in 2020 was 1,793,716, of which 16.8% lived below the poverty level. West Virginia has been affected by the opioid epidemic, which has left families in crisis and led to an overreliance on the child welfare system to protect the state's vulnerable children.



Cammie Chapman, Deputy Secretary of Children and Adult Services, outlines efforts to divert West Virginian children from residential care.

- The education workgroup is creating resources focused on internal rebranding and disseminating the revised philosophical partnership approach between TANF and child welfare to all staff in the Department of Human Services. The workgroup is cross-training staff in the Bureaus for Family Assistance and Social Services and ensuring both know what resources are available from each.
- The differential response workgroup is exploring temporary mechanisms for diverting families from child welfare system involvement, developing a structured decision-making tool for intake staff, and educating mandated reporters on when to report suspected abuse and neglect.
- The Title IV-E reimbursable services workgroup is redesigning the state’s prevention plan, considering how to define “candidacy” for foster care in West Virginia, and establishing a community pathway for referrals.
- The case coordination and data sharing group is conducting in-depth policy analysis and is working closely with the education workgroup on cross-training opportunities that span the Department’s workforce.

## Lessons Learned

The West Virginia team learned how to break down silos between colleagues as part of this prevention work. As one team member shared: “We have learned that there is life outside our Bureau. We are so used to what we do, we don’t necessarily think to look for other resources.” Another key takeaway has been that team members share the same motivation for change. Team members occupy individual roles that are important to them, but the FAST-LC allowed them to think about how to support each other, so they can work toward collective systems success in West Virginia. Finally, the team learned the importance of championing internal staff as leaders. Developing and distributing leadership through workgroups allowed the Bureau Deputy Commissioners to focus on supporting their staff and enabling their individual successes to advance West Virginia’s overall vision for prevention work.