



October 16, 2018

***Open Letter to the Child Welfare Community:***

As you are likely aware, the Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) was signed into law on February 9, 2018 as part of President Trump's Bipartisan Budget Act. This new law gives us a rare opportunity to design a continuum of placement and services from prevention through permanency with additional funding from the federal government. And, if we successfully meet the challenges of implementation, we can serve children, families and communities better.

The FFPSA is the most significant federal child welfare legislation in decades, and it has the potential to have enormous impact on children and families. It aims to prevent children from entering foster care by providing federal funding for evidence-based mental health services, substance use treatment, and in-home parenting skills training. It also seeks to improve the well-being of children by ensuring the quality and appropriateness of foster care placements. To achieve these goals, we must embrace the importance of families, build capacity within communities to support children and families where they live, and emphasize the well-being of children and their parents.

The provisions of this new law are complex, and multiple implementation dates apply. Some changes have already gone into effect, while others are on a longer time horizon. Georgia's Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS), is committed to a phased implementation approach that will include continuous engagement within and outside of the agency, transparency around decisions, and an inclusive and participatory process designed to invite thoughtful dialogue about the impact of these changes and the best way to design a new future. The first critical decision has been made the Administration for Children and Families, the federal agency responsible for monitoring state child welfare programs has been notified that **Georgia intends to implement the FFPSA fully by September 29, 2020**. This timeframe will drive the changes that need to be made to state laws and agency policy, procedure, and training. It also sets the pace for making necessary modifications to information management, financing, monitoring, and data collection systems. And, it motivates capacity-building efforts for more evidence-based prevention service and foster family homes throughout the state.

To facilitate a systematic and comprehensive approach to planning for the implementation of the Act, a Steering Committee within the DFCS State Office has been established, and workgroups and communication protocols are being created to guide and inform the change management process. DFCS cannot do this alone, however. The sweeping changes made by the FFPSA impact the system from end to end and affect all child welfare system stakeholders, Meaningful collaboration and open communication

are more important than ever if we are to realize the full transformative potential of the opportunity we have before us.

This is the first of many communications that will provide our child welfare community updates on progress and announce opportunities for you to shape implementation. Your input is always welcome, so please share your expertise, express your concerns, and voice your opinions. With your help, we can make sure that Georgia's children live safely, in strong families, supported by their communities. Please direct any inquiry and insight to Shelby Zimmer at [Shelby.zimmer@dhs.ga.gov](mailto:Shelby.zimmer@dhs.ga.gov).

Respectfully,



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