

Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy

2005 Legislative Agenda for Children and Youth

Background Information

Parent Education and Support

Issue #5:

Since reaching an all time high in 1998 with over 16,700 confirmed cases of child abuse and neglect in Oklahoma, those numbers have been steadily decreasing. In 2004, the Department of Human Services confirmed 12,347 cases, representing an obvious improvement, but still alarmingly high!

Oklahoma has taken significant measures to reduce the prevalence of child maltreatment, primarily through parent education and support programs. Several effective treatment models are being used, including *Children First*, providing nurse home-visitation to first time parents, *Healthy Families*, providing home-based services to a variety of parents, and *Child Guidance Services*, providing center-based services such as screening, assessment and intervention. All of these programs are located within the Health Department.

One of the challenges of primary prevention programs is the complexity of problems faced by some parents, such as drug addiction and mental illness. For these high-risk parents, intervention strategies of longer duration and intensity may be warranted. In 2001, the legislature created "Safe Care", a pilot program within the Department of Human Services for high-risk parents whose multiple issues place them outside the "risk range" of primary prevention programs.

Finally, the State Department of Education has also responded to this challenge by conducting Parents as Teachers Program to strengthen the capacity of parents, and to foster an early partnership between home and school so that parents take a far more active role in education.

Over the past three years of state revenue shortfalls, these programs, and the young children and families they serve, have suffered tremendously. Over 100 nurses out of 272 were lost to the Children First program, two communities lost their Healthy Families contracts, and 76 schools lost their Parents as Teachers program. Restoring the budget reductions to the FY 02 levels would enable Oklahoma to provide the education and support needed by so many parents to increase their ability nurture and care for their children without resorting to abuse and neglect.

Fiscal Note:

The Children First Program would require an additional \$3,000,000 to bring funding back to the FY 2002 level (although this is not part of the agency's FY06 budget request). The Oklahoma State Department of Health is requesting \$650,000 for the Office of Child Abuse Prevention for the Healthy Families Program, and \$1,260,000 for the Child Guidance Program. The Oklahoma State Department of Education is requesting \$3,825,291 for the Parents as Teachers Program. The Oklahoma Department of Human Services is requesting level funding for the Safe Care Program. *Total request: \$8,735,291.*

Recommendation:

The Children's Agenda supports increasing the funding for parent education and support programs, including Children First, Office of Child Abuse Prevention, Parents as Teachers, Child Guidance, and programs for families at very high-risk for child abuse and neglect.