

**Statement for the Record  
of the  
American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME)  
for the  
Hearing on Improving the Child Welfare System  
Before the  
Subcommittee on Income Security and Family Support  
Committee on Ways and Means  
February 27, 2008**

The American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) represents 1.4 million state and local government and nonprofit employees, including many thousands in the child welfare system. Our child welfare members have the daunting task of investigating allegations of abuse and neglect and recommending whether children should be removed from their homes. They provide ongoing protective services to families whose children are at risk of being removed due to abuse or neglect and help to arrange for services ranging from substance abuse, mental health counseling and respite care to after school programs and doctor visits. They work with families and children who have been placed temporarily in foster care, moving as quickly as possible to reunify the family, or to terminate parental rights so that a child can become eligible for adoption, or pursue other permanent-placement options. They recruit and train foster and adoptive parents. They develop case plans, conduct home visits, appear regularly in court, and produce detailed documentation of all their work.

Unfortunately, child welfare caseworkers all too often do not receive the support they need to attain positive outcomes for at-risk children and families. Caseloads and workloads are often two or three times larger than those recommended by the Child Welfare League of America; competency-based training and professional development opportunities are lacking; meaningful supervision and mentoring are too often unavailable; wages and benefits lag far behind other professions that require similar educational backgrounds but without the responsibility for the lives and well-being of vulnerable children; caseworkers risk violent encounters on a daily basis; and they are often unfairly blamed when a tragedy occurs despite their best efforts.

In recognition of the enormous challenges facing the child welfare system, AFSCME is a founding member of the Partnership to Protect Children and Strengthen Families, along with the American Public Human Services Association, Catholic Charities USA, Center for Law and Social Policy, Child Welfare League of America, Children's Defense Fund, National Child Abuse Coalition and Voices for America's Children. Twenty additional national organizations subsequently have signed on to the Partnership's principles.

## **Invest in KIDS Act**

AFSCME commends Chairman McDermott and this Subcommittee for addressing many of the shortcomings of our nation's child welfare system through the introduction of the Invest in KIDS Act (H.R. 5466). In many respects, the draft bill comports with the Partnership's identified priorities for strengthening all aspects of the child welfare system. Among other provisions AFSCME views as positive, the bill would guarantee federal funding support for child abuse prevention and services; eliminate the antiquated "look back" to AFDC eligibility criteria for federal Title IV-E foster care and adoption assistance coverage; support front line workers through child welfare quality improvement grants to states; and expand eligibility for Title IV-E training funds to all those in the public and nonprofit sectors who are working to keep children safe and in permanent homes.

However, H.R. 5466 diverges from the Partnership's principles in important areas of financing. Specifically, AFSCME urges the Chairman and members of the Subcommittee to reconsider reduction of the foster care and adoption assistance FMAP rates to offset the cost of "de-linking" Title IV-E eligibility from AFDC. Similarly, we do not support the bill's 15 percent cap on reimbursement for administrative costs related to eligibility determination, rate-setting for foster care homes and institutions, and the proportionate share of related agency overhead. Many states are experiencing serious structural budget gaps which, along with unpredictable foster care caseloads and other child welfare system dynamics, make it extremely important that Congress "do no harm" to current funding streams.

AFSCME urges you to take bold steps to strengthen and support child welfare caseworkers. We believe Title III of the bill, "Supporting a Qualified Child Welfare Workforce," is a good start. It addresses some of the most pressing issues facing child welfare caseworkers, including too many cases per caseworker, the need for higher quality and more intensive supervision, and staff turnover. We also urge the Subcommittee to adopt the Partnership's recommendation that the Title IV-E federal match for casework services increase from 50 percent to the FMAP rate, in recognition that the work caseworkers do is at the heart of the child welfare system's mission of providing safety and permanency for our most vulnerable children. To be successful, child welfare reform must support intensive, quality casework services.

In conclusion, AFSCME's members who work in child welfare look to Congress to ensure that they have the support they need to protect and assist vulnerable children and families. We again thank Chairman McDermott and the members of this Subcommittee for tackling comprehensive reform, and for specific proposals that will strengthen the child welfare system. Adequate, dependable federal funding is an important component in addressing the challenges facing the child welfare workforce and the child welfare system itself. We look forward to working with you to craft legislation that will allow us to reach our common goal of improving outcomes for children.