

## 2026 Washington State Policy Priorities

### MAINTAIN EXISTING SOCIAL SERVICES FOR THOSE MOST IN NEED

Washington State faces a significant budget shortfall as revenues fail to keep pace with the cost of essential services, compounded by federal funding cuts. **This moment calls for prioritizing investments in children, youth, and families while advancing structural reforms to create a more stable revenue system.** Modernizing the tax code with more progressive options will strengthen long-term fiscal health and ease pressure on low- and middle-income households. We must protect vital health and human services and ensure sustainable funding that supports families and vulnerable communities.

### KEEP FAMILIES TOGETHER WHILE PROTECTING CHILD SAFETY

A multi-pronged approach is needed to address a recent increase in critical incidents and strengthen public systems' ability to support families. These incidents—maltreatment-related child fatalities or near fatalities involving families with a child welfare case in the prior 12 months—rose in 2025. While rare (less than 0.02% of children served), they reveal gaps in support, driven in part by the fentanyl crisis and compounded family challenges such as substance use, domestic violence, mental health needs, housing instability, and high parental stress.

*Support the following strategies that address the complex, individualized circumstances families experience when they come into contact with the child welfare system:*

- Strengthen the role of Community Based Organizations (CBOs) to serve families involved in child welfare
- Expand family-centered residential Substance Use Disorder (SUD) treatment and access to Medications for Opioid Use Disorder (MOUD)
- Expand pre-filing representation models, which provide early intervention services to pregnant and parenting families so they can remain together and avoid child welfare involvement.
- Expand the Parent Child Assistance Program (PCAP) to deliver intensive case management and recovery support for pregnant and parenting individuals involved in child welfare due to substance use
- Fund public health nurses for parents with children under age 3 with an open child welfare case who are impacted by SUD
- Review court-involved pathways for child welfare cases that do not seek removal of a child

## **PRESERVE SSI AND OTHER FEDERAL BENEFITS FOR CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE**

The Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) withholds federal benefits such as SSI and RSDI from children in its care, using funds meant to support disabled children or those who have lost a parent to pay for state care costs. This practice is unjust and short-sighted, forcing vulnerable youth to finance their own care and increasing their risk of homelessness, food insecurity, incarceration, and unemployment when they age out of foster care.

*Pass and fund [SB 5911/ HB 2169](#) to end the practice of withholding SSI benefits from young people in Extended Foster Care.*

## **IMPROVE ACCESS TO BEHAVIORAL HEALTH FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH**

*Support the Children and Youth Behavioral Health Workgroup and WA Thriving recommendations, including, but not limited to:*

- Establish the WA Thriving strategic plan as a state initiative<sup>1</sup>
- Fund at least 2 clinics to achieve Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics (CCBHC) status (\$5.480m)
- Restore Partnership Access Line (PAL) funding cuts (all 3 lines)
- Develop a shared action plan to build family-centered SUD treatment services for pregnant and parenting people that keep families together and address the whole family unit, on the way to developing a full continuum of family-centered SUD care.
- Suspend consideration of legislation that impacts healthcare and facility regulation work at DOH

## **SUPPORT ITEMS**

*Pass and fund [SB 5940](#) to provide housing vouchers for youth in Extended Foster Care (EFC) who are experiencing homelessness: 13 percent (141) of young people in EFC experienced homelessness in SFY 2024. Young adults in EFC are in the care and custody of the state, and the state has an obligation to ensure these young people are housed.*

Additionally, Partners for Our Children works collaboratively with several organizations and actively supports the policy agendas established by The Mockingbird Society, the Child Welfare Advocacy Coalition, NorthStar Advocates, and others.

Contact information: Kim Justice, Director of Public Policy; Email: [kimjust@uw.edu](mailto:kimjust@uw.edu); Phone: 206.240.8501

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<sup>1</sup> Update the legislation authorizing the CYBHWG to:

- Extend the CYBHWG to Dec. 30, 2031 (instead of Dec. 30, 2029);
  - Require the CYBHWG to use the strategic plan developed by the WA Thriving advisory group to guide its priorities and efforts;
- Establish an FTE coordination role in the executive branch to lead and facilitate implementation of the WA Thriving strategic plan (through public and private funding)