



National Association of Public
Child Welfare Administrators

an affiliate of the American Public Human Services Association

Legislative Summary

Safe Babies Act of 2009 (H.R. 3474 & S. 1554)

The Senate and House introduced identical bills intended to improve the health and well-being of abused and neglected infants and toddlers and to prevent delinquency from occurring later on in their lives. The legislation, known as the Safe Babies Act of 2009 (H.R. 3474 & S. 1554), was introduced on July 31, 2009, by Sen. Tom Harkin (D-Iowa) and Rep. Rosa DeLauro (D-N.Y.). This bill has Democratic support, but no Republicans serve as co-sponsors.

The legislation amends the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act. It would authorize the administrator of the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention to create a National Resource Center, which will develop and implement a new grant program for local court teams for maltreated infants and toddlers. H.R. 3474 & S. 1554 are intended to help address the needs of children ages 0 to 3, who have the highest rate of victimization and are more likely to be placed in foster care.

A New Resource Center

The OJJDP administrator will award a five-year grant to an early childhood development organization to establish and operate the new National Court Teams for Maltreated Infants and Toddlers Resource Center. To be eligible, applying organizations must have expertise in the target population's development as well as in serving their families. The organization must also have expertise in training and educating judges and promoting judicial systems change to aid in reducing child maltreatment.

In addition to the above, those wishing to apply for the five year grant must have a demonstrated ability in the following areas:

- Ability to provide resources to parents and other caregivers
- Ability to provide resources to practitioners in child development, early child care and education, family support, pediatrics, child welfare, juvenile and family courts and mental health
- Extensive knowledge about the linkage of how exposure to violence influences the growth and development of infants and toddlers
- Documented history of collaboration with the public and private sectors to improve outcomes for the targeted population
- The capacity to analyze policy and practice at the state, local and national levels
- Assurances that special consideration will be given to areas that serve large child welfare populations and jurisdictions where a dependency, juvenile or family court judge presides over cases that involve substance abuse, particularly where methamphetamine abuse occurs

Resource Center Activities

The new Resource Center will support the implementation of local court teams and manage the competitive grant awards for communities wishing to establish these teams. The center will conduct national meetings and training sessions for grantees and develop a database to track their progress.

The Resource Center will develop materials to guide dependency, juvenile or family court judges' decision making process for maltreated infants and toddlers. Materials will be made available to train other members of the local court teams and community members about appropriate care for the target population. The center will focus on information on the importance of the following:

- Placement stability and frequent parent–child visitation
- Services to reduce the recurrence of abuse and neglect
- Services to monitor and improve the health and well-being of young foster children
- Timely permanent placement
- Concurrent planning
- Implementing a comprehensive service delivery plan that addresses the needs of the child and parents
- Information for those around the country wishing to develop a court team approach
- State practices that better address the needs of infant and toddlers and their families

The Resource Center will provide technical assistance to local court teams in direction, coordination and implementation oversight. The Resource Center will help locate a local community coordinator for each court team. This coordinator will serve as a child development resource expert and promote the court's judicial leadership between communities and providers.

The Resource Center will train the court teams on the impact of child abuse and neglect on infants and toddlers and improve child maltreatment decision-making by courts to reduce its recurrence and improve developmental outcomes. The center will also provide training to the community on child development, impact of abuse and neglect, comprehensive family group services, parent-child contact, evidence-based parenting interventions, and services available to foster children.

Local Team Court Grants

A dependency, juvenile or family court judge to serve as the judicial leader, along with a local child welfare agency, must submit a letter of commitment to participate in the court team project. The letter must include the following:

- A commitment to work with both the community coordinator and the National Resource Center in forming a team
- A description of the population of maltreated infants and toddlers within the community and the jurisdiction of the court
- Problems the court faces in decisions surrounding the best interests of the child as well as any challenges contributing to the placement of infants and toddlers under the court's supervision
- Information about previous efforts on court improvement initiatives

Court Team Activities

The court team must meeting each month to review cases, incorporate child-focused services and implement best practices in child welfare including:

- Concurrent planning
- Reducing placement changes and frequent child-parent contact
- Comprehensive service delivery plans at the child's removal, pre-removal conferences and kinship placements

Under the guidance of the Resource Center, the teams will organize community training and identify areas of need, including improved mental health and substance abuse treatment. The court teams will prioritize after-care services and participate in a national evaluation of the project.

Permissible activities may include coordinating with law enforcement and establishing and maintaining relations with substance abuse treatment programs to increase access to services for parents.

Data Collection & Evaluation

The Resource Center will create a uniform data collection system and report findings annually to the OJJDP administrator. The administrator will conduct a national evaluation to find the (1) effectiveness of linking children and families to appropriate services; (2) reducing the recurrence of abuse and neglect, (3) promoting timely permanent placements of maltreated infants and toddlers, and (4) reducing costs through system improvements.

Available Funds & Report to Congress

The legislation appropriates \$5 million for each year from FY 2010 to FY 2014. There are no federal matching requirements for funding by the court or child welfare agency under this project. The legislation requires the OJJDP administrator to report to Congress on the implementation and effectiveness of court teams after three years and again at five years after enactment.

NAPCWA's Position

The National Association of Public Child Welfare Administrators is reviewing the legislation and has yet to take a position.

Contact Information

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