



November 24, 2010

The Honorable Tim Gay
Health and Human Services Committee
Nebraska State Legislature
Post Office Box 94604
State Capitol, Room 1402
Lincoln, Nebraska 68509

Dear Chairman Gay:

On behalf of Casey Family Programs, I am pleased to introduce myself to you and other members of the Nebraska Health and Human Services Legislative Committee and to give a brief overview of why we are prepared to strengthen child welfare reform efforts in your state.

Founded in 1966, Casey Family Programs is a national, nonpartisan operating foundation pursuing a mission to provide and improve—and ultimately prevent the need for— foster care in the United States. We recognize that ensuring safe, nurturing and permanent families for all children requires the efforts of a broad network of public and private partnerships and organizations; a widespread understanding of the importance that family connections have on a child's future; and the commitment of parents, extended family and caring adults to provide the love, support, and early learning and other developmental opportunities that every child needs.

Casey Family Programs is in the process of establishing a relationship with the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services and the Division of Children and Family Services to support your state's Child Welfare and Juvenile Services Reform. We are excited about this partnership because your state's reform efforts share our goals to improve outcomes for the most vulnerable children and families.

Currently, we partner with 43 states across the country—and numerous county and Indian Child Welfare agencies—to support policies and practices that improve safety and permanency and well-being for children. Our support comes in many forms, including strategic consulting, technical assistance, research and data. Our team of strategic consulting professionals brings high-level experience in the field and work in teams to share best practices from one jurisdiction to another.

Across the country, children and families are benefiting from efforts to transform child welfare from models that once focused on out-of-home services to those that emphasize permanency and maintaining family connections. As a result of these and other efforts, the number of children in foster care has declined from approximately 511,000 in 2005 to approximately 424,000 in 2009. Reform efforts also have improved accountability by child welfare systems.

This national progress is exactly what our 2020 Strategy for America's Children envisioned when we launched it five years ago. That vision seeks to safely reduce the number of children in foster care and to reinvest savings into front-end services that strengthen families.

It is important to emphasize that our 2020 Strategy is designed for us to operate in a supportive role to child welfare jurisdictions. We do not prescribe specific strategies for leaders and systems. Rather, as we explore opportunities to work with states, we identify factors that demonstrate that our goals and the goals of the state are compatible.

First, we make sure that we listen to state leadership to ensure that we understand the vision. Second, we work to establish goals that are aligned with the state's vision and also with our vision. Third, we seek to understand how the jurisdiction looks to execute its vision. Fourth, we look to identify targets consistent with the aligned vision and the plan related to entries, exits, time in care or total foster care population and set goals for one or more of those measures. Finally, we look to identify strategies that Casey Family Programs can support. Instead of prescribing an approach or strategy, we review widely varying state requests and find solutions.

Financial and operating structures differ in the child welfare agencies we support. We respect individual preferences and approaches of each state while advancing work in our shared goal: safely reducing the number of children in out-of-home care, strengthening families and reinvesting funds in services that prevent the need for foster care. States are accomplishing that goal by focusing on practices that result in safety and permanency. The nation is making great progress as we strive toward our 2020 goals to safely reduce the foster care population by 50 percent by the year 2020, and we believe that our non-prescriptive approach enables us to support states while allowing for the individual differences that make every state unique.

I welcome the opportunity for Casey Family Programs to support Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services Chief Executive Officer Kerry Winterer and Division of Children and Family Services Director Todd Reckling as they lead child welfare reform efforts here. We are preparing to work with them in several areas, including assisting with an evaluation of the reform effort and strengthening several of the components that we believe will lead to successful reform. At the heart of all the work we do together is improving the outcomes for Nebraska's children.

I hope to have the opportunity to address your committee in person in the near future. Meanwhile, our strategic consulting team will be operating to support best practices in Nebraska, and I am available to answer any questions you might have.

Thank you for your partnership and for your commitment to help Nebraska's most vulnerable children improve their opportunity to succeed.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Kimberly S. Ricketts". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Kimberly S. Ricketts, M. Ed.
Managing Director
Strategic Consulting