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Establishing a New National Consortium Blueprint to Strengthen Children and Families: Child Welfare Prevention and Intervention Mapping

The COVID-19 has placed tremendous strain on all families, but we know that high risk families including those experiencing mental health issues, substance use, job loss, housing insecurity, domestic violence, and food insecurity have been particularly vulnerable during this unprecedented global pandemic. Families need supports now more than ever.

The passage of the Family First Prevention Services Act, along with growing momentum at the national, state, and local level to reimagine a child welfare system that works with communities upstream to strengthen families and prevent child protection services involvement has brought laser-focused attention to the need to transform our system of protecting children and families.

Due to the pandemic, state courts are predicting unprecedented filings in most case types as communities begin to open up and many courts are under-resourced in their capacity to handle such a surge of filings and to prevent tremendous backlogs – including in the area of child protection cases. Judicial leaders have been strategically planning for this pending surge of child protection filings, but court leaders can also exercise their leadership role to work with their court and community partners to prevent the need for a child protection petition altogether.

Almost two years ago, a national initiative was launched with funding from the State Justice Institute to develop a conceptual framework, similar to the Sequential Intercept Model (SIM), for the child protection system and at-risk families. A committee of the Conference of Chief Justices and the Conference of State Court Administrators' National Judicial Task Force to Examine State Courts Response to Mental Illness will serve as an advisory group for the further development of the *Blueprint to Strengthen Children and Families* as part of their work. Courts are in an ideal position to lead efforts to support the vision of a community-based approach that is less reactive, more holistic, and focused on keeping children safely with their families and out of foster care. This new initiative – the *Blueprint to Strengthen Children and Families: Child Welfare Prevention and Intervention Mapping (Blueprint)*– is intended to support court leadership to guide collaborative community discussions that result in a more effective and prevention-focused system. It identifies points of prevention and intervention within community services, the child welfare system, and the court to develop a comprehensive picture of how children and families enter and move through the child welfare and court systems. In addition, the points represent opportunities to connect families to supportive community services.

The National Center for State Courts (NCSC) partnered with the Executive Office of the Massachusetts Trial Court and its Juvenile Court to pilot the Blueprint. NCSC is also working with the Indiana Supreme Court to pilot the initial train-the-trainer Blueprint model. Many other states have expressed interest in

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bringing the Blueprint to their states and communities. In an effort to make the Blueprint available to as many states and communities as possible during these challenging times, NCSC has called for the creation of a *National Blueprint Consortium* to train facilitators to conduct child welfare community mappings and develop prevention and intervention strategies to strengthen children and families. In addition, NCSC would provide Consortium members consulting services to strengthen judicial leadership; plan mapping efforts; document state and local findings of data, gaps, and opportunities; and develop and implement action plans. The National Consortium could also inform national systems reform efforts.

We invite interested states and territories to join a Q&A webinar on April 14, 2021 at 3:00-3:30 pm ET to hear about the Blueprint to Strengthen Children and Families and learn what it would mean to join this exciting new National Blueprint Consortium. We encourage state judicial leadership including the Court Improvement Program directors to register and attend and invite other key system partners including child welfare agencies.

The meeting Zoom information is below. And please contact Nora Sydow at nsydow@ncsc.org with any questions.

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://zoom.us/j/96279047314>

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