

HUMAN SERVICES AND EDUCATION

INTRODUCTION

Every county in the United States administers and funds part of the cost of strengthening communities and protecting and enhancing families. The Human Services and Education Committee of the National Association of Counties (NACo) exists to support counties in this work. The role of counties varies widely from state to state, but human services and health expenditures are among the largest parts of county budgets.

NACo supports a broad, comprehensive array of services for families, children, individuals with disabilities and the elderly. Social services, public health, preventive services for children and youth, early childhood development, parent education and support, childcare, and other programs that encourage and support families also strengthen communities throughout our country.

Poverty is a national problem and requires a national solution. Federal efforts to reform public assistance must recognize that poverty is influenced by national economic factors that are not within the control of local or state governments.

Families in poverty usually need support services to become self-sufficient. Education and job training, childcare, Medicaid, mental health and substance use disorder coverage, housing, transportation, veterans services claims representation and work programs are supports that often involve counties. Federal requirements in these programs should be flexible and coordinated with local partners to provide a seamless range of services. Local and state governments are best positioned to assist their citizens when federal programs are flexible and support all generations within a family. The federal government should pursue policies that support and enable state and local jurisdictions to coordinate a multi-generation approach to combat the barriers related poverty, which focuses on creating opportunities that address the needs of children and their parents collectively.

Programs mandated by the federal government should be fully federally funded. It is important that new programs do not duplicate existing state and local efforts; the federal government also must provide adequate time to implement major changes to prevent disruptions in program delivery. Our federal partners should regularly reauthorize human services and education programs to ensure that they address rising costs, adequately meet the needs of participants and have long-term funding certainty.

New federal programs should be integrated with an appropriate, existing administrative delivery system. Congress should encourage coordination with state and local governments when seeking citizen input, such as advisory committees to oversee program development, so that there is no duplication of state and local coordinating efforts.

The federal government should create, support the development of, and fund pilot/demonstration programs for innovative delivery of federal social services and workforce training programs that are offered through local governments. Local governments should be given the resources and flexibility to deliver of federal social services programs through the use and adaptation of technology, including data sharing between programs, and centralized community resource centers, which allow for citizens to apply for several federal social services in a single location, reducing the burden on the constituents and ensuring cost-effective allocation of federal resources.

NACo believes decisions on laws and regulations should be made using data and measurable outcomes. Scrutinizing existing and proposed mandates using these standards will help reduce unnecessary and unfunded mandates, streamline government, and use limited resources effectively, which will benefit clients and constituents alike. NACo urges the federal government to ask these key questions when considering changes:

- Was comprehensive data used to define the problem and desired outcome?
- Were experts who administer the affected programs engaged?
- Will it streamline or add layers of bureaucracy?
- Is it redundant or inefficient?
- Are current local staffing levels sufficient to comply with additional requirements?
- Will we be able to measure the outcomes to be achieved by this change?
- Is there adequate federal funding to pay for all direct local costs?
- Are there other models that may provide better outcomes?
- Have local elected officials been consulted?
- Has there been collaboration between federal, state, and local agencies?
- Does it limit local and state flexibility to be responsive to community needs?

Counties are the front-line providers of basic social services; we seek to achieve an appropriate blend of local administrative flexibility and federal and state standards to provide a basic level of assistance for children and families.

SELF-SUFFICIENCY PROGRAMS

Self-sufficiency programs are meant to be a temporary safety net for families and individuals who are experiencing unemployment, underemployment or have other barriers to self-sufficiency. NACo supports federal legislative and regulatory efforts to streamline and standardize means-tested federal benefit programs, including income thresholds, to make it easier for families and individuals to understand and apply for benefits and for county caseworkers to administer them.

A. Block Grants for Entitlement Programs: NACo believes that the federal government should be responsible for adequately funding its entitlement programs. NACo opposes mandatory block grants and funding caps for federal assistance programs such as SNAP, Medicaid, and Foster Care.

Capped block grants in these programs would shift the full cost of program growth and inflation to states and counties. NACo also opposes reductions in administrative funding for these programs that would result in unfunded mandates to counties and states.

B. Block Grants for Categorical Programs: NACo recognizes strong county government as an essential component and partner in the effective operation of national-state-local human services programs. Local governments are often best equipped to administer human services programs, and therefore must be assured an effective role in the development and implementation of federal programs.

NACo supports consolidating existing categorical grant programs in order to reduce complexity and improve flexibility and program delivery at the local level. Human services block grants must follow the following principles:

- Programs should be controlled by elected county officials responsible directly to the taxpayers.
- Federal block grant proposals must be developed in close consultation with county officials.
- Federal block grant funds for health and social services programs should be allocated directly to counties where an existing service delivery system is in place.
- States must be required to plan jointly with county officials and to publish program plans for review and comments.
- Where direct funding is not available, states must be required to pass through maximum dollars to counties.
- Reasonable transition time should be allowed to move from categorical grants to block grants, including sufficient time to adjust county and state laws, budgets, and administrative procedures.
- There must be an absolute reduction in federal mandates and regulations, and increased flexibility and simplicity in program administration.
- No matching funds should be required of local governments.
- No maintenance of effort should be required. State and local government laws and procedures governing spending should apply to block grants.

C. Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF): The success of TANF depends on counties' flexibility to target local needs and support participants' work activities. Without that flexibility and the funding to implement it, the working families who are struggling toward self-sufficiency will lose supportive services and many will fall back on cash assistance. Welfare reform is an ongoing process of supporting working families in gaining self-sufficiency, not a one-time removal of families from the welfare rolls.

Many TANF participants who find work continue to need assistance with job retention, transportation, counseling and other support services such as child care and health care. Additionally, TANF funding must be able to react quickly to economic downturns and other emerging issues by having unallocated

reserves that states can tap quickly.

1. **Funding:** TANF should have an annual inflation increase, including the supplemental grants for high- growth states. The TANF state entitlement block grant structure should be maintained without carve-outs or set-asides. The funding level for the TANF Contingency Fund should be increased. NACo supports new funding for research and dissemination of information on family formation.
2. **Flexibility:** States, counties, and Native American tribes should be permitted to spend carryover funds on any allowable use of TANF. This would include transferring funds to the CCDBG and SSBG.
3. **Participation Requirements and Work Activities:** NACo opposes arbitrary and counterproductive work and participation requirements and supports a strong county role in mutually negotiated outcome measures in which states are judged by their progress toward achieving these goals. NACo supports greater flexibility in the TANF work requirements in order to allow counties and states to meet the individual needs of their caseloads. These include, but are not limited to, the following:
 - Applying the 50 percent work participation rate (WPR) for two-parent and single parent families by eliminating the 90 percent WPR for two-parent families;
 - Providing flexibility in meeting the 30 hours of work a week requirement for two-parent and single parent families, including allowing partial credit for hours worked that are less than 30;
 - Considering expanding the list of the 12 activities included in the original TANF law that qualify as work;
 - Allowing individuals who are participating in substance use or mental health treatment, and domestic violence services to count those activities as work;
 - Continuing to exclude victims of domestic abuse and mothers with young children from the participation requirement;
 - At least twelve weeks of thirty hours per week a year for job search and job readiness activities;
 - Expanding the percentage of the TANF caseload that could benefit from the 24 month limit for vocational education;
 - Allowing more than 10 hours a week of basic skills and education training to count as work activities and allowing these hours to count toward work participation rates;
 - Removing teen parents from the 20 percent vocational education limit;
 - Exempting relatives who are caring for a child who would otherwise be in foster care from the work requirements and the time limit;
 - Allowing higher education, vocational training and high school equivalency programs to count towards the work participation rates;
 - Exempting adults who are the primary caregivers of a disabled family member from the work

requirements; and

- Allowing a parent providing child care in a two-parent family to count toward the work requirement.

4. **Time Limits:** For time-limited assistance to be successful, it must be accompanied by adequate federal and state funding for a wide continuum of supportive services that will help families move toward self-sufficiency. NACo supports preserving and increasing state flexibility in administering the federal time limits. This includes allowing states to discount months in which the recipient participates in work and/or specific work activities, including substance use disorder treatment, behavioral health and domestic violence services in compliance with their employability plan; and eliminating child care, transportation, and housing from the definition of assistance.

NACo supports the twenty percent hardship exemption and the family violence exemption from the TANF time limit. Victims of sexual assault should be added to this exemption. States should be allowed to lift the lifetime ban on TANF eligibility for individual family members with drug felony convictions.

5. **Maintenance of Effort:** Current law is unclear on the ability of states to supplant existing funding with federal TANF funds, and under what circumstances a state may use federal funds to increase existing state-funded programs. Once a state or county spends its Maintenance of Effort (MOE) for a given fiscal year, it should be able to draw down its full allocation of federal TANF dollars for that year at any time. Unspent funds should not be applied against future allocations. Obligated funds should be treated and reported as spent. The supplantation provisions must be clarified so that replacement of state dollars with federal dollars is strictly prohibited, but allow using federal dollars to increase the coverage or availability of a state program above current state spending levels.
6. **Teen Parents:** Teen parents in particular are at great risk of long-term welfare dependence. Teen parents should be required to pursue their high school education or GED. Alternative education should be provided when needed and waivers should be developed for special circumstances. The education system should make the necessary provisions to provide needed child care, counseling and other supportive services for teen parents. NACo supports alternatives that would encourage teenage parents to live with their parents or other responsible adults, and fund enhanced case management and independent living arrangements.
7. **Program Coordination:** An integrated workforce development system should be encouraged by giving counties greater flexibility to coordinate programs and blend funds. When designing workforce programs with braided funding from TANF and the Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act (WIOA), counties should be permitted to align TANF income eligibility requirements with

WIOA's more flexible policy to ensure maximum coordination and integration between the two programs.

8. **Family Promotion:** TANF already has the flexibility for states to promote marriage and family formation. Any new incentive programs aimed at marriage promotion must be funded with new money, and should not be carved out of TANF. NACo opposes penalties associated with marriage promotion outcomes. NACo supports funding and disseminating further research on these subjects.
9. **Partial Credit:** Many families, particularly those with special needs, struggle to meet their work participation requirements. Under current law, no credit is given for these families, even if they fall short by as little as one hour. Counties and states should be allowed to apply partial credit for the hours that these families participate.
10. **Phasing-Out Benefits:** A single dollar increase in TANF's Income Reporting Threshold can make a family ineligible for benefits and can serve as a disincentive to work. Counties and states should be allowed to gradually phase-out cash benefits as the family's income increases.
11. **Subsidized Employment:** NACo urges Congress to retain and enhance state and county flexibility in using TANF to support subsidized employment programs.

D. Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP): The SNAP program provides nutrition assistance funding to low income families and individuals to support better support healthy and adequate eating habits. SNAP is critical to struggling families and has proven to be one of the most countercyclical federal programs because benefits can reach families quickly during economic downturns as well as natural disasters. The program serves diverse populations with a wide range of needs, and is administered by counties in a variety of states across the country. NACo supports moving a SNAP reauthorization in conjunction with a reauthorization of the Farm Bill.

1. **Program and Funding Structure:** NACo supports the current SNAP entitlement program and funding structure, including maintaining the 50 percent federal administrative match for states given that counties contribute to the administrative costs of the SNAP program in many county-administered states. SNAP should not be block granted, since such a policy change would place additional strain on both recipients and state and local governments. As the introductory statement states, SNAP is indeed a very responsive countercyclical program, as evidenced by the large increases in SNAP participants during the great recession in the late 2000's and early 2010's. Block granting would seriously undermine that responsiveness, leaving struggling families with less access to food and further weakening the economy since SNAP families redeem their benefits quickly and locally. Moreover, counties would see shifts in costs to support those households if the already low benefit is reduced under a block grant.

2. Streamlining SNAP

- a. Administratively and Across Programs:** NACo encourages Congress to increase the options available to state and local administrative bodies in streamlining applications and administrative processes. Local social services departments see many individuals and families that are eligible for multiple programs, but requirements are often slightly different for each program, generating significant work for staff and applicants alike. All states should be allowed to seamlessly enroll Supplemental Security Income (SSI) participants in the SNAP program. In general, as additional programs are streamlined, barriers to entry for participants should be reduced, and Congress and states should not make the most restrictive elements of each program the qualifications required for approval.
 - b. For Recipients:** Congress and the U.S. Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) should work to reduce “churn” – the rolling of recipients on and off of the program – in the SNAP program, which can be a burden for recipients and administrators alike. Administration and application processes should be simplified to allow individuals reapplying for benefits to enter a streamlined process, reducing the time between application and receiving benefits while also reducing administrative costs.
- 3. Importance to Children:** Proper nutrition is crucial to high quality early childhood development goals and ensures children are mentally and physically prepared to learn when entering school. SNAP benefits for families should be at an adequate level so that all children have healthy diets.
- 4. Work Requirements and Time Limits:** NACo opposes arbitrary and counterproductive work and participation requirements and supports a strong county role in mutually negotiated outcome measures in which states are judged by their progress toward achieving agreed upon goals. NACo supports greater flexibility in the SNAP work requirements in order to allow counties and states to meet the individual needs of their caseloads.

 - a. SNAP Employment and Training (SNAP E&T) Program:** NACo supports enabling individuals to find and secure long-term employment and encourages Congress to acknowledge the reality that for time-limited assistance to be successful, it must be accompanied by adequate federal and state funding for a wide range of supportive services. The SNAP E&T program should receive more realistic funding levels from the federal government to ensure states and counties have the proper resources to assist individuals in finding work and remaining employed, including increasing the reimbursement rate, since SNAP E&T is an employment program. SNAP E&T should also be further integrated with existing workforce programs at the federal, state and local level, including local workforce development boards.

- b. Able-Bodied Adults Without Dependents (ABAWDs):** In addition to the increased reimbursement rates for employment programs, NACo supports lengthening the time limit for ABAWDs and making the work requirements more flexible. Often, rapid attachment employment programs are short term, and individuals who find work do not remain employed because they have not developed the required skills. Allowing for increased training and an extended time limit would make employment goals more realistic. Additionally, NACo supports a tax incentive for employers who hire ABAWD SNAP participants for 20 hours or more each month, which could be increased based on the number of ABAWD participants hired. NACo also supports allowing counties in county-administered states to apply for a waiver for the ABAWD time limits if the state does not apply for a state-wide or partial waiver.
- 5. Disqualifications:** Lifetime disqualification from the SNAP program can have a lasting effect not just on the individual, but also on his or her family. NACo supports additional flexibility in disqualification determinations for states and local governments. NACo also supports lifting the lifetime ban on individuals with felony drug convictions in all states.
- 6. Phasing-out of Benefits:** Recipients of federal benefits programs often face a financial “cliff” as they gain employment – the boundary line at which point individuals or families lose benefits given their rise in income. NACo urges Congress to consider gradual phase outs of certain programs, including SNAP, to ease the transition from benefits to income, especially for families.
- 7. Rural Solutions:** NACo urges Congress and the Food and Nutrition Service to pursue solutions that address the specific obstacles rural communities face in ensuring access to food and healthy eating habits in rural areas, which often lack access to healthy food options. States with large rural populations and rural counties should be afforded additional flexibility in the administration of the SNAP program to help combat these challenges.
- 8. Use of Technology:** Among federal benefits programs, SNAP is already a leader in innovation and simplification of benefits, including the use of SNAP EBT cards. The federal government should continue to play a leading role in developing technology that makes program administration more seamless. By pioneering advances at the federal level, the program would be streamlined in states and local jurisdictions across the country.
- 9. Program Integrity:** NACo supports the goals of maintaining low levels of fraud and error rates within the SNAP program. Counties believe that a federal commitment to streamlining the program, increased technological advances, and additional flexibility to eliminate systemic program issues (including program churn) will help achieve this goal.

10. Thrifty Food Plan: Serving as the foundation for calculating Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits, the Thrifty Food Plan (TFP) is used by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to portray what a “minimal cost,” nutritionally adequate food plan entails for different households, reflecting age and gender. NACo supports regular review and updates to the TFP to account for the cost of food more accurately, dietary needs, purchasing patterns and regional differences in food costs, housing and medical care, which affect the purchasing power of SNAP benefits.

11. Military Hunger: Food insecurity amongst active-duty military families, especially junior enlisted, creates a domino effect that leads to a reduction in the readiness of the military force and ultimately a weakening of our national security. Service members and their families should have equitable access to SNAP to ensure enough food for an active, healthy life. The Military Basic allowance for Housing (BAH) should be excluded from income determinations for SNAP eligibility.

E. Supplemental Security Income (SSI): SSI benefits and resource limits have not kept pace with inflation. A significant number of persons, including the homeless, who are potentially eligible for the program, do not participate. Congress and the administration should:

- Consider the impact that changes to SSI will have on county general assistance and indigent health care programs;
- Provide benefits to individuals who receive care in county-owned residential facilities;
- Reevaluate payment levels to ensure SSI recipients are provided with an adequate standard of living;
- Reevaluate the asset limit to reflect inflation;
- Simplify and expedite the application and eligibility process; and
- Fully fund and expand SSI outreach programs.

F. Refundable Tax Credits: The Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and Child Tax Credit (CTC) have significantly boosted the incomes of low-income working households. According to Census Bureau data, the EITC and CTC helps move more children and adults out of poverty than any other program. NACo supports structural changes to the EITC and CTC, including expanding the age of EITC eligibility for childless workers, that increase the number of eligible households and provide higher benefit amounts.

CHILDREN’S SERVICES

A. Early Childhood Education and Development: The importance of the early years in child development is well documented. Quality prenatal services, health care, nutrition, and pre-school education are essential to the healthy development of a child. Early intervention and prevention programs, particularly home visitation programs, produce numerous advantages. Children who

participate in early childhood development programs record outstanding developmental progress and greater success in the future. Other advantages include early detection of health and learning problems, higher educational achievement, preventing juvenile delinquency, lower crime rates, greater parental involvement in school programs, and reduced teen pregnancy rates. Consequently, best practices demonstrate investment in early childhood development programs reduces the need for chronic health care services, utilization of child welfare programs, juvenile justice measures and public assistance. NACo supports federal actions to protect and increase investments in early childhood development and help counties develop and expand voluntary early childhood and parent education programs. They include:

- **Head Start/Early Head Start:** Congress should provide adequate funding for comprehensive programs such as Head Start/Early Head Start, to ensure that needed educational, nutritional, and social services are available to disadvantaged pre-school children, including children with disabilities. Early Head Start, in particular, deserves stronger support so that infants, toddlers and their caregivers can take advantage of the program's continuum of services at an earlier age.
- **Educational Coordination:** NACo supports strengthened coordination among state and federal pre-school programs with county agencies that provide related services to children and their families, such as home visiting, child wellness, Head Start, Early Head Start and quality child care. Federal investments in expanded access to preschool, including Head Start, should emphasize a mixed-delivery system and incentivize and support the provision of high-quality care and education for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers. Along with support for the childhood workforce, collaboration with highly trained and motivated partners who build exceptional early childhood ecosystems are pivotal in providing a generation of young people who enter school ready to learn. Better coordination and follow-up with K-12 schools are needed to ensure that the gains made through early childhood programs are not lost in future years.
- **Nutrition and Food Support:** Adequate nutrition not only prevents serious health problems, but also helps children improve their ability to learn. The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) are valuable components of the continuum of services needed to ensure children's physical and mental development. NACo therefore opposes further cuts to SNAP and supports continued expansion of WIC.

B. Child Welfare Services: The child's natural family has the primary right and responsibility to provide each child a safe and nurturing environment. Society must provide the necessary services and supports to safeguard and enhance the ability of all families to fulfill this essential role. Failing this, it becomes society's responsibility to provide for expeditious, alternative arrangements that are permanent and meet the child's physical, mental, and emotional needs. The societal response works best when governments at all levels collaborate in their efforts to restore children and families to health and wholeness.

In many states child welfare, substance use disorder treatment, behavioral health and services to

individuals with developmental delays/disabilities are administered by counties, yet the various systems fail to operate collaboratively. Consequently, children suffer. Children whose parents struggle with chemical dependencies also suffer from substance use disorder and health problems. States and counties often are able to provide treatment to only a fraction of these parents and children. Access to adequate and timely services is even more difficult to obtain for children and youth with co-occurring conditions such as developmental delays and disabilities. NACo supports funding for new partnerships among federal, state and local child welfare and substance use disorder agencies. NACo further supports increased federal funding for school and community-based behavioral health, developmental and substance use disorder and services for children and youth. Counties must be involved in the planning and implementation process and must be eligible for direct funding.

NACo believes that systems that protect abused and neglected children should be based on a continuum of care, including a broad array of preventive services. When out-of-home care is necessary, kinship placements must be thoroughly explored before a child is placed into foster care. Counties should be afforded flexibility in designing services that best meet the needs of their children and communities.

1. Foster Care, Kinship Care, Guardianship and Adoption Assistance: a variety of foster care situations should be available and sufficiently funded to provide for the differing needs of children. NACo strongly opposes block grants and/or funding caps in the federal Foster Care program. NACo strongly supports the following:

- Modernizing the eligibility determination system by delinking federal foster care eligibility from the 1996 Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) income eligibility standards and developing a financing system that responds to a child's imminent risk of abuse or neglect;
- Acknowledging the role that counties play in the foster care and child welfare system by consulting county officials in the development and implementation of legislation at the federal and state level;
- Enhancing county and state flexibility to provide supportive services for children and their families, including preventing unnecessary removal from the home and enhancing outcomes for children;
- Using Title IV-E funds for subsidized kinship guardianship and kinship post-guardianship services both prospectively and retroactively;
- Allowing Medicaid to cover more than life threatening care for dependent, abused, and neglected undocumented children in state custody. At a minimum, rehabilitation and targeted case management associated with abused or neglected children, and medical care required by federal policy pertaining to foster children should be covered;
- Allowing counties and states to include reunification and post-reunification services within the definition of IV-E Foster Care maintenance payments;
- Allowing IV-E Adoption Assistance funds to be used for post-adoption services for adopted

- children as well as subsidies;
- Government owned/operated residential treatment programs of more than 25 beds in size should be treated on an equal basis as similar not-for-profit and for-profit facilities, and should be eligible for Title IV-E reimbursement;
 - Allowing states and counties to use IV-E funds to provide services for children placed in non-IV-E settings that prevent children from being placed in foster care;
 - Allowing states and counties to use IV-E funds to provide prevention, pre-placement and early intervention services for children who are determined to be candidates for foster care.
 - Allowing child welfare staff to conduct virtual visits through computer technology, rather than in-person, with older youth (over 18 years of age) in extended foster care who are attending college out of state or connecting with relatives.

The 2018 Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) has brought opportunities and challenges to counties as they implement prevention services programs eligible for federal IV-E Foster Care funding and new limits in congregate care settings. As state and county planning and implementation continues, NACo supports the following:

- Legislation and/or administrative initiatives to expand the list of prevention services, including kinship navigation programming, eligible for federal reimbursement;
- Efforts to expand the number of providers of prevention services, including kinship navigation programming, in rural communities;
- Legislation and/or administrative initiatives to mitigate the FFPSA's proscriptive provisions intended to reduce the use of congregate care, with a special focus on remedying the Institutions for Mental Diseases exclusion has the effect of denying federal financial support for placements for high-needs children needing care in facilities with more than 16 beds.

NACo strongly opposes block grants and/or funding caps in the federal Foster Care program because they would undermine counties' ability to ensure the health and safety of our most vulnerable children. If Congress adopts a capped allocation rather than continue to operate under an open-ended entitlement, NACo recommends the following basic principles:

- There must be adequate funding available through the duration of the grant;
- Training and welfare information systems must remain separate from the flexibility proposal;
- States should be required to maintain their current level of effort in child welfare;
- Emergency funds should be flexible and broad enough to allow access by sub-state regions with sudden caseload increases;
- Foster care children must remain categorically eligible for Medicaid;
- States that opt to receive the capped allocation must be allowed to opt back into the open-ended entitlement at any time;

- States should be able to negotiate the funding baseline for a block grant with the federal government;
 - States should be allowed to retain the current flexibility to negotiate waivers for localities; and
 - State associations of counties, in states where counties operate child welfare systems, must be consulted and state legislatures must have the right to approve a state’s request to opt into the capped allocation system.
2. **Foster Youth:** Research shows that children aging out of foster care generally have poor outcomes. NACo urges a national “call to action” to raise awareness of the issues faced by children aging out of the foster care system. Additionally, NACo supports the following measures to improve outcomes for youth aging out of foster care:

- Enable disabled youth receiving federal foster care payments to immediately receive SSI benefits when leaving the foster care system;
- Enhance federal funding for workforce development, housing, health care, independent living programs, mental health, substance abuse services, and transitional services; and
- Coordinate and align resources between human services and workforce development to ensure completion of secondary education, gainful sustainable employment and/or post-secondary occupational training.

3. **Training and Administration of Foster Care, Kinship Care, Guardianship and Adoption Assistance:** Proper administrative support for these programs is essential to ensure children’s continued well- being. NACo opposes any attempt to cap the Title IV-E administrative reimbursement for foster homes and social worker case management costs as an unwarranted cost shift to counties and states. States and counties also need to be given adequate time and resources to implement new requirements such as more frequent case reviews and automation of records and systems.

Staff training should be reimbursed at 75 percent regardless of the proportion of children in a state who are eligible for federal IV-E Foster Care maintenance and Adoption Assistance program payments. Additionally, states should have the flexibility to use IV-E funds for cross-agency training of child welfare staff and other public and private agencies that work with these children, including substance abuse, mental health, education, juvenile justice, probation, and welfare agencies. Training funds should also be provided for foster parents, kinship care and guardianship care providers, and adoptive parents.

4. **Child Protective Services:** Federal policy must ensure local capacity and flexibility for immediate response to reports of child abuse and must provide a coordinated, comprehensive services systems that are designed to protect children and restore family functioning. NACo supports the development of an outcomes-based child protection system through a series of benchmarks developed at the local level that will monitor a community’s progress based on its

socio-economic needs and priorities.

5. Addressing Sexual Abuse in Families: Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) causes a lifetime of dramatic and costly emotional and physical issues. Because of false shame and fear of destroying the family, most familial CSA is unreported and underreported, meaning the incidence is, in fact, much higher. NACo urges the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' (HHS) Administration for Children and Families' (ACF) Children's Bureau to develop dedicated resources that educate families and child welfare stakeholders on best practices for preventing, identifying, and responding to CSA.

C. Child Care: Adequate supply of high-quality child care services is critically important for meeting the developmental needs of children while supporting the ability of parents to participate in the workforce. Even though the high cost of child care is financially burdensome for most families, the industry suffers from extremely thin profit margin, as business expenses are high and revenue generation is limited. The child care workforce is chronically underpaid, further exacerbating supply challenges.

NACo urges our federal partners to pass legislation making significant investments in child care capacity, including a comprehensive strategy for workforce recruitment and retention, to ensure providers have adequate resources to sustainably serve low-income families. Federal support for high quality child care should be available to all public assistance recipients who need it while participating in employment, education, or training and to working parents and caregivers as they leave public assistance, including TANF, on a sliding fee scale. Funding for the Child Care and Development Fund Block Grant must be increased to meet the needs of eligible families and support the supply-building needs of providers, including capital investments. NACo supports federal funding and other incentives for public-private partnerships that recognize affordable, high-quality childcare is critical to developing prosperous local economies, sustaining a reliable workforce and can meet the unique needs of individual communities.

Financial support should be made available for infant care, child care for children with special needs, children in foster care, and child care during non-traditional hours when needed.

Public child care resources such as licensing and monitoring of providers, information and referral, and assistance in selecting appropriate care, should be available to all, without regard to income or resources. State and local licensing laws should be carefully monitored to ensure communities have the flexibility to meet their needs without compromising child safety, educational quality and adequacy of facilities and caretakers.

Employers should be given increased financial incentives to provide child care for their employees on site or as a benefit. The Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit should be made refundable.

- D. Child Support:** It is the right of every child to be supported by his or her parents. NACo supports the federal Title IV-D Child Support Enforcement program as a cost-effective means of ensuring that right. NACo supports providing federal financial incentives to states that opt to pass-through a higher percentage of child support collections to families on public assistance. NACo urges Congress to permanently restore the ability of counties and states to draw additional federal match dollars from the reinvestment of child support incentive payments. County-administered child support programs should be allowed to retain the full application fee for cases where the custodial parent is not receiving cash assistance by identifying it as an administrative cost rather than as program income.

NACo supports removing the cap on the Child Support Incentive Fund and supports maintaining the 66 percent reimbursement rate for administrative costs and the 90 percent rate for genetic testing. NACo supports programs that assist non-custodial parents to be appropriately involved in the lives of their children financially and emotionally. Any new child support enforcement mandates must be accompanied by enhanced federal reimbursement.

NACo opposes private sector access to child support data and enforcement tools.

NACo supports legislation that creates a corrective action plan for states that have been unable to implement federal child support requirements; restricts penalties to corrective action plan non-compliance; and allows alternative systems configurations that provide expanded local flexibility for automated child support payments.

NACo supports legislation to streamline the international enforcement of child support obligations of parents who live outside the United States.

- E. Child Nutrition Services:** Current federal child nutrition programs do not adequately meet the needs of children experiencing food insecurity, which negatively impacts their learning, physical health and overall wellbeing. NACo supports removing administrative and resource barriers that block children in accessing the nutrition they need to thrive, and supports all children having access to breakfast, lunch and snacks at school, in childcare and during the summer months at no cost.

Additionally, Local Educational Agencies (LEAs) and participating childcare providers must receive adequate funding and reimbursement to implement this program and meet rigorous nutrition standards. NACo encourages Congress to additionally promote nutritional children's meals in our schools and within our community to ensure all have access to healthier food options. NACo further urges our federal partners to provide states and counties with the necessary resources and flexibility to implement new and/or expanded child nutrition programs.

SERVICES TO OLDER AMERICANS

Between 2011 and 2030 the 78 million individuals who were born between 1946 and 1964 will reach the age of 65. This means that the number of older adults in the U.S. will more than double. Not only will there be significantly higher numbers of the elderly, they will also be living longer. Individuals over the age of 85 are already the fastest growing sector of the population. At the same time, the number of working age people is only increasing by 20 percent and there will be fewer workers to support the retired population.

NACo supports a continuum of care for the elderly that provides supportive services to assist older persons remain active, productive and independent. These services would include adult day care, transportation, respite care, housing alternatives, caregiver training, support groups, in-home support services, family counseling, daily money management, public conservatorship and guardianship services, as well as chore services, personal care, skilled nursing care, and long-term care.

NACo supports federal policies that recognize the role and responsibilities of county government in assuring necessary and effective services for the elderly, including community-based and long-term care services. Federal policy should recognize that these costs have increased, and should support, facilitate and provide adequate federal funding for county implementation of these ever increasing costs and responsibilities.

A. Older Americans Act: NACo supports the Older Americans Act's goal of developing a coordinated program of services and opportunities for our older citizens. The Act should provide maximum flexibility for county governments to target resources to address the needs of the elderly in their community. Congress should fully fund the programs authorized under this legislation. Congress should expand and improve access to daily nutrition and meal services, respite care, home care services, adult day care, services to family caregivers, information and referral services, and research.

The changes in the aging population require better planning and targeting of health and human services programs. NACo urges the federal government to assist states and counties by funding in-depth needs assessments to determine the real needs of the elderly in their community and the adequacy of existing services and gaps in delivery.

B. Long-Term Care: County government has a long, established role as a provider, purchaser, administrator and/or contractor for long-term health care. Services should be provided in the least restrictive environment meeting the individual's needs.

Additional flexibility should be provided in Medicare, Medicaid, Veterans' Services, and other federal programs to encourage and enable the expansion of community-based care and assisted living facilities as a means of avoiding unnecessary institutional care.

Informal caregivers should be given support and provided incentives to encourage them to continue to provide support for those in need of services.

Rural counties have a higher percentage of senior citizens than urban counties, but they are less likely than their urban counterparts to have access to in-home and community-based services. NACo supports efforts to expand these programs in rural areas.

- C. Adult Protective Services:** Adult Protective Services (APS) vary widely among states and generally cover neglect, self-neglect and fiduciary and physical abuse of the elderly and disabled adults. In many states, counties have the responsibility for APS. Unfortunately, there are no clear data on the incidence of elder abuse and neglect nationwide although some studies suggest that almost 11 percent of people ages 60 and older faced some form of elder abuse and a 2009 report by the MetLife Mature Market Institute and the National Committee for the Prevention of Elder Abuse estimates that seniors lose at least \$2.5 billion each year to financial abuse. There is insufficient national information on the victims and perpetrators of abuse or evidence-based best practices. The Elder Justice Act (EJA) was enacted in 2010 and is the first federal program designed to combat abuse, neglect and exploitation of older adults. Federal funding for state and local APS programs was authorized initially at \$100 million annually, but was first funded in 2020 with an appropriations of nearly \$94 million as part of the Coronavirus Response & Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act. Counties in many states are responsible for adult protective services. NACo therefore supports full funding for the EJA and a federal research strategy.
- D. Social Security:** As the providers of last resort for health and social services, counties have an interest in preserving the benefits received by the nation's most vulnerable populations. Social Security benefits prevent poverty for people of all ages. NACo urges Congress, as it reforms Social Security, to protect the financial security of current and future Social Security beneficiaries, especially low-income individuals, the disabled and surviving spouses and children.

SOCIAL SERVICES

There must be a human services program designed to achieve the full objectives of encouraging self-support, self-reliance, strengthening of family life and the protection of children and adults. The broad range of supportive social services needed to strengthen the community and family structure should emerge at the local level from a federal-state-county partnership that provides for maximum flexibility at the county level.

These services should be administered at the local level and adequately funded at the federal and state levels. States should be required to pass through to counties the majority of the state's share of federal funds. To ensure this pass-through, a limit should be placed on the amount states can retain for administrative or other purposes.

- A. Social Services Block Grant (SSBG):** SSBG is used by many counties for a variety of programs, such as adult protection, child care for children with special needs, child welfare, and child abuse prevention. In some cases, such as adult protection, this is the only source of fund for these services.

SSBG statutory funding has dwindled over the years from a level above \$3.1 billion to its current level of \$1.7 billion, which in reality is lower because it is affected by sequester cuts in 2013. NACo supports restoring the program to the highest level possible. Additionally, NACo strongly supports continued flexibility in the SSBG program and maintaining the authority to transfer up to ten percent of TANF funds to SSBG. This flexibility enables states and counties to use the program to meet their specific local needs and goals.

- B. Services to Individuals with Disabilities:** Counties recognize that the objectives of encouraging self- support, self-reliance, strengthening of family life, and protective services apply equally to the physically, mentally, and developmentally disabled. NACo supports federal action that will promote these objectives by removing categorical restrictions that inhibit comprehensive planning and delivery of services to the disabled.

NACo supports federal action that increases incentives for deinstitutionalization and encourages and funds the expansion of community-based services, including the necessary individual and program financial support, to prevent reinstitutionalization. NACo supports equal opportunity for individuals with disabilities in all aspects of American life. Federal funding is necessary to supplement local efforts to achieve program and facility accessibility and equal employment opportunity.

- C. Community Action Agencies:** Through its boards involving the public sector, the private sector, and the community, the Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) represents a unique and effective partnership with counties, states, federal government and community organizations. NACo strongly supports full funding for CSBG.

- D. Domestic Violence:** Domestic violence is a major social problem not only because of its high incidence, but also because of its pervasive and self-perpetuating nature. The problem affects not only spouses, but also individuals in a wide range of living arrangements, including children, senior citizens, and those with developmental problems.

Children living in violent homes, whether victims or witnesses, frequently become abusive parents and/or mates themselves. Domestic violence is often associated with the development of other social and emotional problems. Treatment of the problem often involves temporary respite and permanent community resources to shelter victims. However, federal funding is insufficient.

The federal government should fund domestic violence programs that permit counties and

communities to develop resources and services to protect family members and prevent family violence, improve staff training, and link programs in the health, behavioral health, self-sufficiency, child welfare, criminal justice, law enforcement, and social service systems for effective treatment and prevention of domestic violence.

- E. Energy Assistance for Low Income Persons:** NACo recognizes the need for a comprehensive energy assistance, weatherization, and conservation program with sufficient federal funding and incentives so that the cost burden does not fall on county government.

Eligibility criteria should include renters. It should not discriminate against single-person households and should not be limited to persons eligible for other federal programs. At the same time, every effort should be made to coordinate with other programs in order to simplify the application and eligibility program.

Congress has not always appropriated emergency or contingency funds for the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP). There needs to be a fund that addresses sudden situations such as fluctuations in energy costs, natural disasters and extreme weather conditions.

- F. Assistance for the Homeless:** NACo recognizes the need for a comprehensive national policy to end homelessness and poverty. A significant federal commitment is necessary to meet the growing need for services, including housing, mental health services, and substance abuse treatment to ensure that the burden for providing care and assistance to the homeless does not fall disproportionately upon counties. NACo endorses the federal strategic plan to prevent and end homelessness; especially the commitment for greater cooperation among federal agencies and the special attention being paid to veterans, families, and youth.

- G. Veterans' Services:** NACo strongly supports full funding to qualified veterans for educational, housing, and medical costs. County Veterans Service Officers (CVSOs), who are employed by counties, work to secure benefits for veterans by collaborating with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), state Departments of Veterans Affairs (SDVAs) and Veterans Service Organizations. NACo endorses sustained federal financial support for CVSOs providing these benefits services. Benefits generated by CVSOs are not limited to individual veterans and often provide cost savings to local governments and revenue that goes back into the local economy. To improve outreach by CVSOs to transitioning service members, NACo supports action by the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) and VA to increase coordination and information sharing at the federal level and with their state and local partners. DOD and VA must work collaboratively to identify and connect transitioning service members with SDVAs and CVSOs prior to their departure from active duty. Efforts to improve information sharing must prioritize service members' privacy and confidentiality while also creating a more streamlined and effective process for new veterans to connect with their CVSOs. When a service member opts into sharing their DD Form 214, DOD must ensure all service

branches proactively provide those records to intergovernmental partners in a uniform fashion.

NACo endorses increased investments in solutions to veteran homelessness, and encourages both the Administration and Congress to continue to increase the resources targeted to end homelessness among veterans through programs such as the Veterans Affairs Supported Housing (HUD-VASH) program, Supportive Services for Veterans Families (SSVF), and the Grants and Per Diem program. NACo supports a process that is responsive to the needs of veterans and their families, provides appropriate information, and facilitates administrative services.

- H. National and Community Service:** AmeriCorps (formally the Corporation for National and Community Service) and the programs it funds such as AmeriCorps VISTA, AmeriCorps NCCC, AmeriCorps State and National, the AmeriCorps Seniors Foster Grandparents Program, the AmeriCorps Seniors Senior Companion Program, and AmeriCorps Seniors RSVP help youth and senior citizens become involved in the community and provide volunteer services to millions of Americans. NACo supports full funding for AmeriCorps.
- I. Emergency Preparedness, Response and Recovery:** NACo supports continued close coordination with emergency management agencies (EMA), increased federal funding and more flexible eligibility for county health and human services costs incurred during emergencies under Public Assistance and other programs. Such initiatives will help EMAs to ensure that county health and human services agencies are supported financially and integrally involved in emergency response planning, training for staff and volunteers, supporting disaster response, mass care and shelter services, continuing the provision of human service benefits, and supporting recovery efforts. Such funding would improve disaster response for older individuals and persons with disabilities, persons living in poverty, as well as those experiencing pre- and/or post-disaster homelessness.

LEGAL IMMIGRANTS, MIGRANTS, REFUGEES AND UNDOCUMENTED INDIVIDUALS

Legal immigrants, refugees, undocumented individuals, and others enter and remain in this country as a result of federal action or inaction. The heavy fiscal burden that is placed upon local governments is the direct result of national immigration policies or the lack of enforcement of immigration policies. It is imperative that be an on-going consultation process on immigration issues with NACo and other national organizations representing state and local governments.

A. Comprehensive Immigration Reform: NACo urges Congress and the President to enact comprehensive immigration reform legislation that:

- Provides for uniform enforcement of all existing laws;
- Secures our borders;
- Includes a national strategy for coordination among federal, state, local and tribal authorities;
- Establishes a sensible and orderly guest worker program;

- Imposes no unfunded mandates on state and local governments;
- Includes no mandates on counties to enforce immigration laws;
- Preserves the eligibility of legal non-citizens for federally-funded health benefits and provides a sustainable funding stream to counties for their cost of providing health services to legal non-citizens who are denied federally-funded health benefits;
- Establishes an earned path to citizenship that includes registering, background checks, demonstrating employment, learning English and civics, paying back taxes and fees that may be required;
- Improves and simplifies the current legal immigration system; and
- Provides green cards for science, technology, engineering and mathematics students who have received a graduate degree from American universities.

C. Services: Counties traditionally provide health, self-sufficiency programs and social services to persons residing within their boundaries, regardless of their legal status. Since immigration is a federal responsibility, the full cost, including administrative costs, of any services or assistance to non-citizens should be paid by the federal government rather than by county and state governments.

The 1996 welfare reform law limited refugee eligibility for SSI to seven years. NACo strongly supports restoring full SSI eligibility to refugees.

In addition to reimbursing county governments for costs incurred in assisting legal immigrants, refugees, undocumented individuals, and others, the federal government should strengthen its enforcement efforts to control illegal immigration.

C. Refugee Program: Refugees should be resettled in a manner that minimizes their concentration into a few counties. When making decisions to admit new refugees into the country, the U.S. State Department should give advance notice of those decisions to the states and counties that are most likely to be affected by the refugee resettlement.

There should be a permanent federal refugee program with uniform policies for all refugee groups and with sufficient federal funds to provide assistance during resettlement. Refugee resettlement funding has deteriorated over the years from 36 months to eight months of assistance. Federal funding should continue at the 100 percent reimbursement level for financial assistance, medical care, social services, employment services, and education until refugees reach a reasonable level of self-sufficiency.

It is critical that funding formulas respond not just to the challenges that state and local governments face at the point of initial resettlement. Secondary migration needs to be addressed through accurate data and funding that follows the refugee.

The federal government should develop contingency plans, in consultation with state and local

elected officials, for mass asylum situations in which the U.S. is the country of first asylum. The legal status and rights of applicants for asylum and their eligibility for federal assistance must be clear and consistent.

The federal government must increase its dialogue with and accountability to state and local governments. NACo opposes any proposal that would transfer funds needed by states and counties for refugee assistance to resettlement agencies without proper state and county consultation and agreement. States and counties should have the flexibility to use refugee employment services for hard to serve populations who have been in the U.S. more than five years.

- D. Unaccompanied Children Crossing the Border:** NACo calls on the Administration and Congress to ensure that adequate federal funds are appropriated to shelter and provide care, including medical assistance, to unaccompanied children crossing the border and to ensure that the costs of the care provided to these children are not transferred to counties.
- E. Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) Recipients and Temporary Protected Status Holders:** NACo calls on Congress and the Administration to enact legislation that, without imposing costs on counties, would allow certain undocumented immigrants who entered the country as children and/or for humanitarian reasons to attain legal status if they pass background checks, demonstrate good moral character and meet education requirements.
- F. Immigration Enforcement:** NACo urges the federal government to carry out its enforcement of immigration law in a humane manner that minimizes negative impacts on families and children, including possible separations, and does not increase reliance on local social safety-net services or create new demands and administrative costs for counties without adequate resources and funding from the federal government.

Additionally, NACo supports legislative or regulatory proposals that at least maintain current statutory legal immigration levels and opposes any efforts that would significantly reduce legal immigration to the United States.

- G.** NACo calls on the Administration and Congress to provide necessary funding for USCIS to reduce the visa backlog and process new applications. NACo supports federal legislation and regulatory efforts to improve processing times, such as digitizing application materials for electronic processing and increasing staffing capacity.

EDUCATION

Education is key to the success of our economy and our ability to attract businesses to our communities. Furthermore, our quality of life is directly related to a quality education in our schools.

Local education systems affect all segments of the community and are critical to the success of many programs operated by counties. Regardless of the specific funding arrangements between counties and school districts, they share a common tax base and are both faced with limited resources.

A. Elementary and Secondary Education: Although states have the primary responsibility for elementary and secondary education, it is in the national interest and merits continued federal financial support. NACo urges Congress to substantially amend the Elementary and Secondary Education Act to grant greater local flexibility in the use of student achievement measures, the design of interventions for schools not making Adequate Yearly Progress and to address the individual needs of students with disabilities and students of English as a Second Language. NACo strongly urges Congress to fully fund the law so that states and local education agencies (LEAs) can implement all aspects of the law. Congress must commit to fully funding Title I grants to schools to ensure adequate resources for our most vulnerable youth. Congress should provide increased funding to assist local communities in meeting regulations designed to eliminate discrimination.

NACo supports the current method of disbursement of funds LEAs and does not support the use of vouchers and policies such as tuition tax credits that would provide an unfair competitive advantage to private schools and erode support for public schools.

Bullying and harassment interfere with students' ability to achieve higher academic standards and can lead to even greater school safety problems. NACo urges the federal government provide school districts with the tools and resources they need to ensure that all students feel safe within their schools.

NACo supports the development of partnerships between schools, counties, local organizations and state and federal partners to support children from military families.

- 1. Health Services in Schools:** Medicaid program should reimburse states, local governments and LEAs for health and behavioral health services provided in schools. This reimbursement should include direct services such as medical appointments and therapies and administrative services such as outreach and care coordination activities.
- 2. Impacted Areas:** Congress must recognize the burdens placed on communities that have a large number of federal employees and facilities and must continue to provide federal aid to meet the extra costs involved in educating the children of federal employees.
- 3. Education for Children with Disabilities:** NACo supports the goal of available free public education to all children with disabilities. Congress must keep the federal commitment to ensure full funding for the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act so that states and LEAs can meet the law's requirements.
- 4. After-School Programs:** County governments run a variety of programs such as after school day care, mentoring/tutoring and recreational programs. Programs such as the 21st Century Community Learning Centers should be available directly to counties.

5. **School Construction:** NACo supports efforts to establish federal incentives that will help state and local governments finance school repair, renovation, modernization, and construction projects and facilitate the development of community services for children and families in school buildings.
6. **Social and Emotional Learning (SEL):** NACo supports increased federal funding for Social and Emotional Learning (SEL). Decades of research have demonstrated the effectiveness of Social Emotional Learning (SEL) for supporting students' academics, behaviors, mental health, and long-term success. COVID relief legislation has offered temporary federal resources for school districts to invest in SEL in order to help students recover from the impacts of the pandemic on their social and emotional wellbeing. However, because of limited resources, few school districts are able to budget dedicated funds towards long-term SEL interventions. NACo urges Congress and the administration to provide funding, guidance and technical assistance to school districts and early childhood educators, in collaboration with other community partners, to implement comprehensive SEL programming.

B. Adult, Career and Technical Education: The federal government should place increased emphasis on the promotion of career technical programs across the secondary and post-secondary educational spectrum. These programs should respond to the needs of the local economy and should be coordinated with local self-sufficiency and job training programs. Congress should provide adequate funding for adult education, including English as a Second Language programs.

C. Higher Education and Financial Aid: According to the American Association of Community Colleges, there are 986 public community colleges nationwide and local funds provide 17 percent of their revenues. Additionally, several local governments fund four-year colleges. Pell Grants play a significant role in community college financial aid due to their lower tuition and higher percentage of low-income students. NACo therefore believes that Pell Grants and federally backed student loan programs are vital if this nation is to preserve equal educational opportunity and receive the benefit of the fully developed talents of the younger generation. Loans and grants should be based on economic need and require reasonable levels of self-help.

NACo also supports veterans' and their dependents' utilization of GI Bill education benefits and policies to assist them in accessing courses to obtain a degree. Additionally, NACo supports continued funding for veterans' vocational rehabilitation and apprenticeship opportunities.

D. Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) Education: STEM-related jobs are expected to grow by 17 percent over the next decade, with 60 percent of those jobs requiring college degrees or higher, yet the U.S. is not attracting enough students into those fields. NACo strongly supports efforts to improve STEM education, including health sciences, at all levels of the educational continuum. These efforts should include attracting more STEM teachers to rural elementary and secondary schools and encouraging groups that are underrepresented in the field to pursue STEM

education, particularly women, African Americans and Latinos.

HUMAN SERVICES AND EDUCATION RESOLUTIONS

Resolution Supporting Social Security Administration Actions to Improve Access to Social Security Card for Children and Youth in Foster Care

Issue: A lack of consistent process and record requirements in regional Social Security Administration (SSA) offices has resulted in significant delays in obtaining Social Security cards for children and youth in foster care.

Adopted Policy: The National Association of Counties (NACo) urges SSA to develop and distribute a standardized set of requirements for state and county child welfare agencies pursuing Social Security cards for children and youth in foster care and to provide a singular point of contact for issue resolution.

Approved | July 15, 2024

Resolution on Combating Predatory Practices in Veterans Services

Issue: Veterans navigating the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) benefits system should never bear the burden of paying for initial claim representation. In 29 states, counties realize this principle by using primarily local dollars to train and hire accredited CVSOs who are dedicated to helping veterans access their service-connected benefits free of charge. Unfortunately, in the wake of the PACT Act's historic passage, non-accredited, for-profit businesses are increasing their efforts to prey on vulnerable veterans, using legal loopholes to charge exorbitant "consulting fees" for claims assistance.

Adopted Policy: The National Association of Counties (NACo) urges Congress and the Administration to take legislative and regulatory action to protect veterans from predatory claims representatives, including reinstating criminal penalties for companies that charge fees for unsanctioned claims work and coordinating across agencies and levels of government to identify and prosecute predatory claims to the fullest extent of the law. Additionally, we call on our federal partners to authorize and fund resources to expand and develop the CVSO workforce to ensure all veterans can quickly access qualified assistance with their benefits claims.

Approved | July 15, 2024

Resolution on Improving Care and Access to Benefits for Military Sexual Trauma

Issue: Military Sexual Trauma (MST), which refers to sexual assault or sexual harassment occurring at any point during an individual's military service, is reported among 1 in 3 female veterans and 1 in 100 male veterans in the VA healthcare system. Unfortunately, accessing the proper services and supports can be a difficult and retraumatizing process for victims. Reforms are needed to ensure military sexual trauma (MST) survivors' access to care and benefits, as well as bolster MST claims processing.

Adopted Policy: The National Association of Counties (NACo) urges Congress and the administration to pass legislation that improves the process through which veterans, including former Guard and Reserve members, can file claims and receive counseling and care for Military Sexual Trauma.

Approved | July 15, 2024

Resolution on Studying the Relationship Between VA Benefits and Veteran Suicide Prevention

Issue: Currently, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), in its National Suicide Prevention Annual Report only analyzes how many veterans who die by suicide had recent interactions with the VA through medical or mental health appointments. However, suicide prevention goes beyond just mental health practices and can include economic and material supports. A more comprehensive understanding of the role that the full range of VA benefits play in preventing veteran suicide would inform better data-driven policy decisions to address this national crisis.

Adopted Policy: The National Association of Counties (NACo) urges Congress and the administration to take legislative and regulatory action to study the upstream factors that best prevent veteran suicide, including examining the relationship between VA benefits and suicide outcomes. This includes veterans' use of disability compensation, education and employment benefits, home loans and foreclosure assistance, and housing assistance programs as part of its analysis in the annual suicide prevention report. The VA should analyze this data to identify which benefits have the greatest impact on preventing suicide and make recommendations for incorporating these findings into its ongoing suicide prevention strategy.

Approved | July 15, 2024

Resolution in Support of Federal Funding for Social Media Safety Education and Training

Issue: The U.S. Surgeon General issued a warning on May 23, 2023, stating that “there are increasing concerns among researchers, parents and caregivers, young people, healthcare experts, and others about the impact of social media on youth mental health” with such concerns including anxiety, eating disorders, depression, and suicide. Social media is additionally used to facilitate cyberbullying, privacy invasion, fraud, human trafficking, sexual harassment, sexual predation, the sale of illegal narcotics, hate, and disinformation.

Adopted Policy: The National Association of Counties (NACo) urges the Federal Government and Congress to assist counties by providing funding for 1) social media safety education to make youth and students aware, in an engaging and age-appropriate way, of some of the most serious social media-related dangers and how to protect themselves from these threats; 2) the provision of evidence-based educational outreach for parents and caregivers focused on raising awareness around the various social media-related dangers and providing practical steps parents can take to protect their children; 3) school administrators and parent associations to develop or enhance in-school and out-of-school social media safety policies and guidelines; 4) high-quality research regarding the evolving social media-related threats to the safety and welfare of K-12 students; 5) the provision of social media safety education and other interventions for foster youth, who may be at significantly higher risk for social media-related harms.

Approved | July 15, 2024

Resolution Urging Congress or the President to Establish a Federal Office of New

Americans

Issue: Without a National Immigrant Inclusion Strategy led by a Federal Office of New Americans, Counties find themselves without the support and resources necessary to support the civic, social, and economic inclusion of newcomers.

Adopted Policy: The National Association of Counties (NACo) urges Congress or the President to establish a Federal Office of New Americans that is charged with a National Immigrant Inclusion strategy and actively works with counties and local governments to promote and support immigrant and refugee integration into, and inclusion in, the civic, social, and economic life of the United States. This office would function to coordinate the efforts of Federal, State, County, and local entities to support such integration and inclusion. It would also ensure that the Federal Government and Federal agencies promote the pursuit of United States citizenship among immigrants and refugees. Additionally, the Office would work with Counties and other local entities to improve access to workforce development programs, social services, and education, by ensuring that such programs meet the demand and the unique language, training, and credentialing needs of immigrants and refugees. And finally, through a robust stakeholder engagement strategy, the Office would provide consultation and leadership to Federal Government officials on the challenges and opportunities facing such entities with respect to immigrant and refugee integration and inclusion.

Approved | July 15, 2024

Resolution Urging Congress to Decrease the Error Rate of the E-Verify System

Issue: The error rate in the E-Verify System keeps authorized workers from employment which impacts government and local employers' ability to attract and hire a diverse workforce.

Adopted Policy: The National Association of Counties (NACo) urges Congress to require SSA and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services to reduce the error rate for the E-Verify system to less than 0.1%. Counties specifically call on the SSA and USCIS to create systems that will reduce errors that disproportionately impact our Latinx, LGBTQ+ and women residents. NACo further supports working with the E-Verify Platform to improve human made errors by making sure the requested information regarding naming conventions within government data bases, the I-9 Form and the E-Verify application process are consistent.

Approved | July 15, 2024

Resolution to Re-Establish the U.S. House Select Committee on Aging

Issue: As the nation's population rapidly ages, counties face increasing demand and challenges in providing comprehensive systems of care to our older residents. We need more holistic work by both chambers of the U.S. Congress to study and address an array of aging issues including workforce, housing, health, welfare, education, and long-term care. However, currently, only the U.S. Senate has a committee dedicated to these critical issues.

Adopted Policy: The National Association of Counties (NACo) urges Congress to re-establish and make permanent the House Select Committee on Aging.

Approved | July 15, 2024

Resolution Supporting the Major Richard Star Act

Issue: Currently, Veterans who were medically retired because of injuries incurred in combat or combat-related training are only eligible for their full retirement pay from the Department of Defense (DOD) and disability compensation from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) if they served for 20 years and have a disability rating of 50 percent or higher. Otherwise, medically retired Veterans who were injured in combat see their DOD retirement reduced dollar-for-dollar by their VA disability compensation. This unfair forfeiture financially punishes our most severely combat wounded Veterans and their families.

Adopted Policy: The National Association of Counties (NACo) urges Congress to ensure that Veterans whose military careers were cut short due to combat-related injuries are no longer subject to an offset reducing their VA disability compensation and DOD retirement pay.

Approved | July 15, 2024

Resolution Calling for Increased Funding to Implement New Child Care Development Fund Regulations

Issue: On March 1, 2024, the Administration for Children and Families issued a final rule outlining new affordability requirements for the federal child care subsidy program, the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF). Without additional federal funding, states and counties may not have sufficient resources to implement the rule without reducing access to the program.

Adopted Policy: The National Association of Counties (NACo) urges Congress authorize additional funding for the CCDF program to ensure lead agencies can follow affordability rules without reducing available child care subsidies.

Approved | July 15, 2024

Resolution to Preserve Federal Benefits Eligibility for Participants in County-Led Income Support Pilots

Issue: Counties across the nation are investing local dollars in pilot programs to provide direct income support to vulnerable residents. However, receiving assistance at the local level may interfere with participants' eligibility for other important federal health, nutrition, housing and anti-poverty programs, disincentivizing and penalizing pilot participation.

Adopted Policy: The National Association of Counties (NACo) urges the federal government to ensure individuals participating in county-led income support pilots do not lose eligibility for other federal assistance programs.

Approved | July 15, 2024

Resolution to Support Improvements to Federal Child Welfare Program

Issue: Federal law provides support to states and counties to serve families in the child welfare system. Some of that support is from programs funded under Title IV-B of the Social Security Act. While a relatively small amount of funding, IV-B programs do not have federal eligibility rules and may be used for a range of services, including child protection, supporting, preserving and reuniting families and to promote and support adoption. Title IV-B is pending reauthorization.

Adopted Policy: The National Association of Counties (NACo) urges a reauthorization of Title IV-B child welfare programs that increases funding and county flexibility by minimizing the different programmatic requirements to enable counties to blend and braid those funds with other programs to meet the needs of families in their communities. Those flexibilities would include eliminating or giving counties more ability to meet the even distributions requirements which must be spent in four service areas in the Promoting Safe and Stable Families (PSSF) program.

NACo supports funding in Title IV-B to make new and sustainable investments in a high-quality child welfare workforce, including incentives to increase pay to fill worker shortages, boost retention, and keep caseloads manageable. To support those workers who operate in highly stressful environments, NACo also urges investments in mental health and wellbeing initiatives. Finally, NACo urges federal support to enable counties to replace their legacy IT infrastructure to better serve families and the caseworkers who depend upon the systems daily.

Approved | July 15, 2024