

WHAT TO KNOW ABOUT...



# FAMILY FIRST ACT IN ARKANSAS

All children deserve to grow up in  
safe, stable, and nurturing families.



# FAMILY FIRST FITS US

**DCFS' existing family- and safety-focused values and practices already fit with the values and requirements of Family First.**

We've been putting the key placement elements of Family First into action for the past three years before this federal legislation passed. For example, we've worked hard to reduce our use of emergency shelters and group homes, and we've increased placement stability and relative/fictive kin placements.

Family First allows us to continue those efforts and tackle prevention issues in new and creative ways thanks to more flexibility in how we can use federal funding.





# FAMILY FIRST ACT

## KEY THEMES

**All children deserve the opportunity to grow up in safe, stable, and nurturing families. The Family First Act represents a historic step toward better aligning federal child welfare policy with this critical vision for our nation's children and families.**

- +** Children and youth do best in a strong family and families do best in supportive communities.
- +** Kids of all ages need close family relationships to develop and grow.
- +** Children and youth can grow up in their own homes, and families can be kept together, when caregivers have access to treatment and support services that improve their ability to safely care for their kids.
- +** Family First supports early intervention and evidence-based programs that help keep families together, aligning with broad public support for investing in children and youth, preventing child abuse and neglect, and engaging local communities in services and programs for children and families.





# FAMILY FIRST ACT

## WHAT DOES IT DO?

The Family First Act is the first major modernization of the child welfare system in decades. It provides federal resources to help children, teens and families in crisis and limits federal funding for congregate care.

Family First gives us the ability to continue to improve outcomes in three main areas:



**PREVENTION**



**REUNIFICATION**



**PLACEMENT IN  
FAMILY-LIKE SETTINGS**



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# FAMILY FIRST ACT

## FOCUS ON...PREVENTION

**Family First allows states the option to use Title IV-E funds to provide prevention services and programs.**

These services and programs can be provided for up to 12 months for children at imminent risk of entering foster care, any parenting or pregnant youth in foster care, and the parents – biological or adopted – as well as kin caregivers.

The new prevention services, as well as training and administrative costs associated with developing these services, would have no income test. Eligible services are:



**Evidence-based mental health and substance abuse prevention and treatment services**



**In-home parent skill-based services**

Family First also allows for Title IV-E foster care payments to be made for a child in foster care placed with a parent in a residential family-based treatment facility for up to 12 months. It also permits Title IV-E support for evidence-based kinship support programs.



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# FAMILY FIRST FITS OUR

## FOCUS ON...PREVENTION

**Remember we've been emphasizing the importance of engaging families in prevention services.**

Family First allows for Title IV-E foster care maintenance payments to be made for a child in foster care placed with a parent in a licensed residential family-based treatment facility for up to 12 months. The new legislation also permits Title IV-E support for evidence-based kinship support programs.

We believe, and Family First echoes:

-  Children do best in a strong family and families do best in supportive communities.
-  Kids need close family relationships to develop and grow.
-  Children and youth can grow up in their own homes, and families can be kept together, when caregivers have access to treatment and support services that improve their ability to safely care for their kids.





# FAMILY FIRST ACT

## FOCUS ON...REUNIFICATION

**Family First also offers enhanced support for reunification services and programs.**

Family First eliminates the time limit for reunification services provided during a child's placement in foster care and adjusts the start of time limits for family reunification services to the date of reunification instead of the date of foster care placement.

This change will allow activities to be provided to a family for a 15-month period that begins on the date that the child returns home (is reunified).

Family First also makes provisions for enhancements to the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC). Specifically, it requires that states operating a Title IV-E program use an electronic interstate case processing system to expedite the interstate placement of children in foster care, guardianship, or adoption by Fiscal Year 2027, and provides \$5 million in grants to states.





# FAMILY FIRST ACT

## FOCUS ON...FAMILY-LIKE PLACEMENTS

**Family First recognizes what we already know - Children and youth do best in a strong family.**

Family First establishes new procedures and protocols to promote placement in foster family home settings.

The following placement options already are allowable under current Title IV-E and will continue under Family First:

- Facility for pregnant and parenting youth
- Supervised independent living for youth 18 years and older
- Specialized placements for youth who are victims of or at-risk of becoming victims of sex trafficking
- Foster Family Home (defined as having no more than 6 children in foster care, with some exceptions)

Family First also funds placements in narrowly-defined residential placements called **Qualified Residential Treatment Programs**, or **QRTP** placements.





# FAMILY FIRST ACT

## FOCUS ON...QUALIFIED RESIDENTIAL TREATMENT PROGRAMS (QRTP)

Family First allows federal funding to be used to support foster care placements in narrowly-defined family-like residential placements.

These placements are referred to as **Qualified Residential Treatment Programs**, or **QRTP** placements. Eligible QRTP placements meet these requirements:

- Has a trauma informed treatment model
- Has registered or licensed nursing and other licensed clinical staff onsite
- Facilitates outreach and engagement of the child's family in the child's treatment plan
- Provides discharge planning and family-based aftercare supports for at least 6 months
- Is licensed by the state and accredited

Several existing residential treatment providers have already made adjustments to their treatment models to align with the Family First requirements, so you will see little difference in your daily work.





# FAMILY FIRST ACT

## HOW DO WE MAKE IT SUCCESSFUL?



**Family First is an opportunity – but strong federal, state, and local stakeholder collaboration are key to its success.**

We can all play a role in the successful implementation of the Family First Act:



Child welfare leaders and professionals need to bring to the table their expertise and sense of urgency to act



Courts and the judiciary system need to listen and adapt to protect vulnerable youth and keep families together



Policymakers should be prepared to collaborate on solutions that modernize child welfare services



Advocates, businesses, nonprofits and local leaders all must raise their hands and engage to truly transform child welfare in their communities.

**Successful implementation also requires engaging the advocates who pushed for passage of the Family First Act – young people, parents, and relatives with first-hand experience in the foster care system. These constituents must be invited, consulted, and meaningfully engaged as the law is implemented.**



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