# The Family First Prevention Services Act: A Breakthrough for Critical Child Welfare Services Needs

## The Fundamentals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What is this law?</th>
<th>Why is it important?</th>
<th>What does it mean to child welfare services providers?</th>
<th>What is this law?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Family First Prevention Services Act restructures the federal child welfare system to prioritize keeping children in family settings or, when needed, by providing high-quality residential treatment.</td>
<td>For the first time, federal child welfare funding can be used for services aimed at preventing entry into foster care. This improvement has the potential to enable child welfare services providers to expand their efforts tied to improving the lives of children, youth and families nationwide.</td>
<td>Providers will be able to be reimbursed by federal child welfare funding in a new way to provide prevention services when they comply with new eligibility rules.</td>
<td>In order to use federal child welfare funds for prevention services, each state needs to submit a revised plan for operating child welfare services and comply with new eligibility rules for residential treatment facilities.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Family First in a Nutshell

The bipartisan Family First Prevention Services Act (“Family First”), groundbreaking legislation enacted in February 2018, fundamentally changes the way the child welfare system is organized and funded, and what child welfare services providers must do to be eligible. For the first time, health and human services providers will be able to be reimbursed by federal child welfare funding for delivering quality services and programs aimed at preventing entry into foster care. Family First also sets new limits on the use of federal child welfare funds for longer-term placements of children in child care institutions, aimed at ensuring children are placed only when they need a level of care that cannot be achieved in foster family care.

## Why Family First Matters So Much

Because Family First is funded under an entitlement program, adding new allowable services and eligible individuals increases the amount of federal funding that flows to the program—vital for the many children, youth and families in America and the providers that serve them. The law will also allow innovative programs to build on philanthropic support and obtain more sustainable funding to expand services to more people. Further, Family First prioritizes support for evidence-based practices that have been demonstrated to be effective: 50% of prevention funds must be spent on programs designated as “well-supported,” indicating the highest level of evidentiary support, as determined by a review of the programs by a prevention services clearinghouse set up under the law.

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How the Lutheran Services in America National Network Is Engaging

Lutheran Services in America has supported this important legislation since it was first introduced in 2016. It is critical for the more than 100 organizations within our national network that play a dominant role in child welfare issues and initiatives. On any given day our network works with 12,000 children in foster care and over 40,000 children and families from coast to coast, striving to strengthen families to stay together and when that isn’t possible, to help ensure children and youth are connected to their communities, schools, jobs and families, and are able to lead safe, healthy and productive lives. Family First enables our providers to tap their full potential to operate programs geared toward preventing children from entering foster care in the first place—a tenet so central to our network’s collective work—and to receive much-needed federal reimbursement for doing so.

What is the Implementation Status of Family First?

Beginning October 1, 2019, states became eligible for federal reimbursement for working with child welfare services providers to deliver evidence-based prevention services to children and families at risk of entering the foster care system. This is provided that states have assembled new child welfare program plans approved by the federal government, and that they are complying with the new limits on which child care institutions are eligible for federal child welfare funding.

Given Family First’s technical requirements and the need for states to submit detailed program plans, states are allowed to seek up to a two-year delay on compliance, but they will not be eligible for reimbursement for prevention programs during any such delay. All states will have to comply with all aspects of the law by October 1, 2021.