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The Foster Care Crisis

Mark E. Courtney
School of Social Work
and
Institute for Research on Poverty
University of Wisconsin–Madison

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Abstract

Foster care is a poorly studied and poorly understood social service program. In particular, foster care has received almost no attention from poverty policy analysts in spite of its growing size and close relationship to the Aid to Families with Dependent Children program. In this article, I describe historical and recent trends in foster care caseloads and costs and suggest that the child welfare services system is in a state of crisis. I describe the current policy framework in child welfare, arguing that it does not hold out much promise for resolving this crisis. Lastly, I argue that it is perilous for politicians and policy analysts to ignore the potential impact of currently discussed welfare reform efforts on the foster care system.

The Foster Care Crisis

In spite of its substantial caseload and the frequent media attention that is drawn to the tragic failures of its young charges, foster care remains a poorly studied and poorly understood social service program. A current case in point concerns the unexamined relationship between foster care and the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program. The makers and analysts of poverty policy have largely ignored the foster care program, even though it is a direct programmatic outgrowth of the AFDC program and about half of the children in care come from families that are eligible for or receiving AFDC. This lack of attention to foster care is a serious and potentially costly oversight. In light of the troubling trends in the foster care caseload, currently discussed attempts at welfare reform may well reap unanticipated—and expensive—consequences.

Federal assistance to help states make maintenance payments for children placed out of their homes by a child welfare agency was first provided in 1961 under the old Aid to Dependent Children (ADC) program (Title IV-A of the Social Security Act), now known as AFDC. The federal role grew out of the recognition that some states were denying ADC payments to children when the determination was made that the child's home was "unfit." The 1961 regulations required that states either continue ADC payments while making efforts to improve the conditions in the home or provide out-of-home care for the child. Federal financial participation was only available for the placement of children who had been receiving ADC in the month preceding foster care placement. Later amendments made the program permanent, made it mandatory for the states, allowed for payments to children in private, not-for-profit institutions, and expanded eligibility to include children from families who were eligible for ADC when the child was removed from the home regardless of whether the family was actually receiving ADC at the time.

Comparisons of the size of the AFDC foster care program relative to its "mother" program, AFDC, provide a strong argument for a better understanding of foster care and its relationship to

overall poverty policy.¹ The number of child recipients of AFDC increased by 29 percent over a recent seven-year period from approximately seven million in 1985 to about nine million in 1992. Over the same period of time, the foster care population grew by 60 percent—twice the rate of AFDC growth—from around 276,000 in 1985 to about 442,000 in 1992 (Tatara, 1993).

The relative growth in the federal costs of both programs provides an even more striking contrast (see Figures 1 and 2). Federal expenditures on AFDC benefits and administration grew from \$7.76 billion in 1981 to \$13.79 billion in 1993. In contrast, federal expenditures for foster care maintenance payments and administration leapt from \$309 million to \$2.55 billion over the same period. Under current law, it is estimated that by 1999 federal AFDC expenditures will increase to \$16.43 billion while federal foster care expenditures will grow to \$4.38 billion. Thus, as Figure 2 indicates, although estimated federal spending on AFDC in 1999 will have grown by about 112 percent from 1981 levels, federal foster care spending will have grown by over 1,300 percent! From another perspective, while the ratio of federal AFDC costs over foster care costs was 25 to 1 in 1981, it may well decline to less than 4 to 1 by 1999.

In essence, AFDC foster care is a program whereby the government takes over primary childrearing responsibilities from poor parents based on the assumption that it can and must do better. The numbers presented above imply that soon the federal government will be spending about one-fourth as much attempting to raise the children of poor families as it spends on the primary income support program for poor families.

In considering such changes, it is important to note that these foster care costs are for Title IV-E eligible (i.e., AFDC eligible) children only—about half of all children in foster care. Although there are no reliable national figures on the total cost (including state and local expenditures) of the foster care program, an American Public Welfare Association analysis of thirty-one state child welfare plans in 1990 found that states expected to provide 68.1 percent of foster care maintenance payments

Figure 1 here

Figure 2 here

and 57.2 percent of foster care service payments in that year. In contrast, states and localities paid approximately 45 percent of total AFDC expenditures in 1993. Thus, assuming that the federal government continues to pick up about 40 percent of the costs of all foster care spending, including the costs of non-IV-E children, and 55 percent of all AFDC costs, the ratio of total AFDC spending to total foster care spending will likely be closer to 3 to 1 by 1999.

To understand and appreciate the nature of the crisis in foster care underscored by the trends noted above, one must go beyond the growing size of the foster care program and consider the factors contributing to the current foster care caseload, including legislative and judicial elements of child welfare policy. Such an examination leads to two conclusions: (1) it is highly unlikely that foster care caseloads will be reduced or their growth stemmed, given the resources associated with child welfare services and the framework within which policies pertaining to those services are made; and (2) the crisis in the system presents problems for reform of the AFDC program. This paper focuses primarily on the fiscal implications for government of the neglect of foster care.

THE MORASS OF CHILD WELFARE SERVICES: HOW DID WE GET HERE ANYWAY?

The federal government, by design and lack of enforcement of existing child welfare regulations (Ellertson, 1994), allows the states great latitude in the administration of child welfare programs. The consequent variation in foster care programs from one state to another makes difficult any effort to discuss "national" foster care policy. Nevertheless, it is increasingly clear that federal legislation as well as federal and state court decisions has had enormous, if not always planned, impacts on the foster care system. In particular, laws mandating that child abuse be reported and that public agencies respond to such reports, the "permanency planning" movement, and court decisions leading to the growing use of paid foster care by relatives are critically important parts of the context

of the current crisis. The increasingly troubled nature of the clients of the child welfare system also contribute to the crisis.

The Response to Child Abuse and Neglect

The "rediscovery" of child abuse and neglect during the 1960s and early '70s led to federal legislation that has done much to increase the "demand" for foster care. Spurred on by the focus on "the battered child" during that period, state legislatures began to enact laws requiring that child abuse be reported by teachers, doctors, etc. (Antler, 1978; Stein, 1984). By 1974, the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA, Public Law 93-247) was passed by Congress providing federal financial support to states that chose to develop programs for the prevention, identification, and treatment of child abuse and neglect. As part of the law and its revisions, states which receive assistance must enact laws that require various professionals (e.g., teachers, physicians, social workers, psychotherapists) to report suspected incidents of child maltreatment to law enforcement officials.

Mandated child abuse and neglect reporting has profoundly influenced the foster care system, since these reports must be responded to by child welfare authorities and are the primary means by which children come to the attention of the child welfare system. Since the passage of CAPTA and supporting legislation by the states, the reported prevalence of child abuse and neglect has dramatically increased in the United States and continues to rise, thus contributing to a drastic increase in the demands on child welfare services including foster care (Besharov, 1990; Kamerman & Kahn, 1990). Altogether, reports of child abuse increased 50 percent between 1985 and 1993, approaching 3 million (National Committee to Prevent Child Abuse, 1994). In contrast, about 670,000 reports were filed in 1976 (American Humane Association, 1989).

Permanency Planning

By the late 1970s, interest in finding adoptive homes for hard-to-adopt or "special needs" children in foster care (e.g., ethnic minorities, older children, children with disabilities), along with the perception that many children were being placed inappropriately in foster care or were spending inordinate amounts of time in the system, led to demands for reform of the existing child welfare services system. The primary legislative consequence of this reform movement was the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980 (Public Law 96-272).

Public Law 96-272 transferred the foster care program from Title IV-A to a new Title IV-E. The law altered the funding mechanism for foster care by retaining its entitlement status but linking it to Title IV-B (Child Welfare Services) spending in order to encourage states to use their IV-B monies for prevention of out-of-home placement and rehabilitation of families. Prior to this, many states had used much of their Title IV-B funding to help defer state costs of foster care placement. It also created a program of adoption assistance payments to parents who adopt children with special needs.

Public Law 96-272 requires the states to implement a number of programs and procedural reforms in order to obtain maximum federal financial participation in their child welfare programs.

These include:

- a statewide information system and inventory of children in foster care;
- a preplacement preventive services program providing "reasonable efforts" to prevent child placement;
- procedural safeguards regarding child removal and placement;
- a detailed case plan for every child in care;
- standards for care emphasizing placement in a "least restrictive" environment, in close proximity to parents, and with kin when possible;

- judicial or administrative case reviews done every six months and a dispositional hearing within eighteen months of a child's placement; and
- services to reunite children with their families or find another "permanent" placement.

In essence, the focus on "permanency planning" in Public Law 96-272 calls for prompt and decisive action to maintain children in their own homes or place them, as quickly as possible, in permanent homes with other families (preferably guardianship or adoption).

Although the procedural and programmatic requirements associated with permanency planning are based on laudable intentions, in practice they also lead to considerable paperwork and time spent in court on the part of child welfare workers. Crucial to an understanding of the impact of these reforms is that they were put in place just as reports of child abuse—the primary source of "demand" for child welfare services—were beginning to skyrocket. Unfortunately, while foster care spending has grown with the foster care caseload, the funding for casework services under Title IV-B Child Welfare Services has not (see Figure 3). For example, while IV-E spending grew over 700 percent between 1981 and 1993, IV-B spending only increased about 80 percent over the same period, from \$163.4 million in 1981 to an estimated \$294.6 million in 1993. Even after adjusting for inflation, federal foster care spending grew by over 400 percent between 1981 and 1993 while IV-B spending only grew by about 14 percent. Furthermore, although an unknown portion of funds provided by the Title XX social services block grant are spent by the states on child protective services, these funds have declined in real terms since the early 1980s. Thus, after the implementation of CAPTA and P. L. 96-272, the child welfare services system is left providing fewer and poorer services to a much larger and growing clientele (Kamerman & Kahn, 1990; Maluccio & Fein, 1992).

The Changing Characteristics of the Foster Care Caseload

If foster care is intended to be the "life raft" for children who can no longer remain safely at home, then the boat is being swamped, not only by the sheer number of its passengers, but also by

Figure 3 here

their numerous and expensive special needs. Various studies have found that up to 60 percent of foster children suffer from moderate to severe mental health problems and that about 40 percent have physical health problems (Halfon, English, Allen, & DeWoody, 1994). The mental and physical health problems of foster children create a significant, although for the most part unquantified, impact on the need for services. For example, a recent study of the utilization of Medi-Cal—California's version of Medicaid—found that foster children are almost ten times more likely to use mental health services and are likely to be hospitalized almost twice as long as other children on Medi-Cal (Halfon, Berkowitz, & Klee, 1990). Thus, while foster children make up only about 4 percent of California children on Medi-Cal, they account for 40 percent of all Medi-Cal mental health expenditures. Furthermore, recent surveys of child welfare agency personnel indicate that alcohol and drug abuse is a serious problem for somewhere between one-third and two-thirds of the families coming into contact with child welfare agencies (Curtis and McCullough, 1993). The problems the clients of the child welfare system bring with them call attention to the fact that the magnitude of the costs associated with the foster care program should not be measured by foster care maintenance payments alone.

The past several years have also seen a significant change in the age distribution of children entering foster care, with new entrants being much younger than entrants in earlier cohorts. According to data from the Multistate Foster Care Data Archive, between 1990 and 1992, infants accounted for nearly 25 percent of all first admissions of children entering foster care in California, Illinois, Michigan, New York, and Texas (Goerge, Wulczyn, & Harden, 1994). In contrast, infants accounted for about 23 percent of all entries between 1987 and 1989 and about 16 percent of entries between 1983 and 1986. In all of these states except Texas, infants are remaining in care considerably longer than children in any other age group, and even in Texas they are staying longer than all but adolescents. The likelihood of these infants being adopted after they spend any significant time in foster care is quite low (Barth, Courtney, Berrick, & Albert, 1994). Thus, the recent rise in foster care

caseloads includes a foster care "baby boom" which will almost inevitably result in a historically unprecedented number of children being raised for virtually their entire childhoods in some form of foster care.

African-American children are particularly likely to wind up in foster care. In 1990, the likelihood that African-American children would be in foster care ranged from three times (Texas) to over ten times (New York) that of Caucasian children (Goerge et al., 1994). The overall foster care prevalence rate in 1990 for African-American children was about 4.4 percent in California and 4.2 percent in New York, the states with the largest foster care populations. Over 5 percent of African-American infants in these two states lived in foster care at any given point in time in 1990.

Of course, an overall point-in-time prevalence rate likely greatly underestimates the proportion of children who will spend some time in foster care over the course of childhood. For example, like other children, many African-Americans born in the past several years who did not enter care in their first year will do so before they reach adulthood, given that about three-quarters of first entries to foster care happen after the age of one. Furthermore, since best estimates indicate that nearly two-thirds of children entering care exit within three years (Goerge et al., 1994) and fewer than one-quarter of these reenter care (Courtney, in press; Wulczyn, 1991), prevalence rates for older children are not exclusively, or even largely, a function of infants or other young children staying in the system indefinitely. Thus, although an accurate estimate is not possible at this time, current numbers suggest that by the end of adolescence a large proportion of African-American children in at least some of our largest states, if not across the country, will have spent some time in foster care.

Kinship Care

Landmark federal legislation and the myriad problems facing America's children are not the only contributors to the current face of foster care. The relatively recent development of paid foster care by relatives of court dependents—kinship care—has resulted in a drastic and rapid change in the

types of settings in which foster children are likely to grow up. For example, while in the early 1980s placements with kin accounted for fewer than 10 percent of foster care placements in such large states as California, Illinois, and New York, by the end of the decade they accounted for about half of all placements (Courtney, 1994; Goerge et al., 1994; Goerge, 1990; Wulczyn & Goerge, 1992). Early evidence indicates that the shift towards kinship care is having a major impact on permanency outcomes for children entering foster care, including slower family reunification rates and lower adoption rates (Barth, Courtney et al., 1994; Courtney, 1994; Goerge, 1990; Thornton, 1991). In other words, children entering kinship care are more likely than children placed in foster family homes or group care to remain in the foster care system for a long period of time, if not indefinitely. Even if child welfare authorities wished to alter this trend, it would be very difficult, given that the number of non-kinship foster family homes in this country declined from about 147,000 in 1984 to 100,000 in 1990 (National Commission on Family Foster Care, 1991).

What are the reasons for the phenomenal growth of kinship care? Various states, localities, and individual social workers and judges have no doubt contributed to this trend in ways that cannot be easily observed, let alone described, given the decentralized nature of child welfare services. However, certain factors other than the obvious lack of other placement options in the face of growing substitute care caseloads appear to have played a major role.

In response to P.L. 96-272, current permanency planning philosophy in child welfare places emphasis on keeping children "with family" even when they are removed from the home of their birth parents. This is particularly important when the permanency plan is for the child to be returned home to the birth family, which is the case for the vast majority of children entering the foster care system. Common sense suggests that a stay with a relative is likely to be less traumatic for a child removed from parental care than placement with unfamiliar foster parents or group care providers. In addition, it is also possible that the option of paying kin to care for a child, as opposed to having to find an

appropriate foster home, makes the difficult decision to remove a child from home easier for social workers and judges.

Anecdotal and some empirical evidence suggests that child welfare workers believe that because the child is still living with family, placement with kin reduces the need to provide reasonable efforts to return children to their biological families (Barth, Berrick, & Needell, 1994; Iglehart, 1994). Presumably, the ability to find kin to take a child frees up time for social workers to spend on casework activities related to other clients on their normally large and demanding caseloads. If this relative lack of attention to kinship care is true, it may contribute to the slower rate of family reunification for children placed with relatives.

Though the emphasis in P.L. 96-272 on finding the most family-like and least restrictive placement for foster children helps to make kin an attractive placement resource, judicial rulings at the federal and state level have probably contributed most to the impetus to place children with kin by providing equitable financial support to relative caregivers (Gleeson & Craig, 1994). In particular, the ruling by the U.S. Supreme Court in Miller v. Youakim (1979) opened the way for kinship care by requiring that relatives not be excluded from the definition of foster parents eligible for federal foster care benefits. If a child considered for out-of-home placement comes from a birth-parent's home that is AFDC eligible, relative caregivers are eligible for the same reimbursement provided to non-kin foster parents, as long as the kin can meet state standards for foster care. Relatives who care for children placed by court order who do not come from an AFDC-eligible family are eligible only for AFDC payments, rather than AFDC foster care payments. In practice, numerous states have established more lenient standards for the approval of relative foster care homes than for non-kin foster homes, and at least sixteen states reimburse kin at the same rate as other foster care providers regardless of whether the child in care is AFDC eligible (Gleeson & Craig, 1994).

The argument over the provision of foster care payments to relatives is understandable given the differences between AFDC and foster care reimbursement practices. States set their own foster care rates. Comparisons between AFDC and foster care rates are complicated by the fact that states generally vary their foster care payments according to the age of the child, but by any measure AFDC per capita payment rates are generally not as high as foster care boarding rates. For example, the median AFDC payment for one person was \$212 in 1993, while the median foster care payment for a child of nine (the midpoint of foster care rates nationally) was \$318. At \$294, even the median AFDC rate for a family of two—an amount intended to support two people—was slightly less than the foster care rate for one.

Similar to AFDC, foster care rates ranged widely between states from a low of \$161 for a child of two in West Virginia to \$621 for a youth of sixteen in Alaska. Even so, the lowest foster care rate paid nationally was significantly higher than the \$60 Mississippi paid for one person on AFDC, and the highest rate was greater than the maximum AFDC rate of \$504 paid by the State of Alaska.

In addition to being greater than AFDC rates, foster care rates are proportional to the number of children placed (i.e., two children of the same age will generate twice the foster care rate of one), while AFDC per-capita payment rates decrease with increased family size. Thus, the larger the number of children in a family, the greater the difference between the amount of money the family may receive from AFDC and the amount it may receive in foster care reimbursement.

The decision to make foster care reimbursement the same for kin and non-kin foster families can be easily justified on the grounds of equity. Why should the state pay "strangers" more than kin to care for a child in need? Indeed, it is hard to envision a child welfare system consistent with our cultural or "family" values that did not support the ability of the extended kin network to care for children in a time of family crisis.

At the same time, current funding arrangements may provide a perverse financial incentive for AFDC families to have children placed in kinship care, since the higher foster care rates usually represent a net financial gain for the extended family. This financial incentive can be quite large when there are two or more children involved.

The Clothes Have No Emperor and Are Not Likely to Find One Soon

Existing child welfare policy reflects frequently conflicting values and a lack of political will. CAPTA acknowledges our desire to enlist nearly all adults who have meaningful contact with children in the project of protecting all children from child maltreatment. Unfortunately, one of its main effects given current resources is to lay at the steps of the child protective services office a mountain of child abuse reports too large for adequate response. Nevertheless, mandatory reporting creates an entree to foster care for ever growing numbers of children. CAPTA largely reflects the American tradition of "child saving," but not family preservation.

In contrast, the 1980 legislation of P.L. 96-272 and court decisions supporting its implementation are also concerned with protecting children, but emphasize a commitment to keep a child "in the family." In the absence of resources adequate to provide any meaningful help to the overwhelming number of families coming to their attention, child welfare authorities are forced to engage in a process of triage. Agencies increasingly decline help to a growing proportion of families being reported for child abuse and neglect (Kamerman & Kahn, 1990), and shuttle an increasing number of children to kin with little provision of supportive or permanency planning services.

Further complicating the problems cited above is an apparent lack of political will to reform the child welfare system. This is manifested in the scant attention paid to the system's current predicament and the unwillingness of federal and state governments to allocate sufficient resources to allow child welfare personnel to do their jobs. While the inclusion of \$1 billion over five years in the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1993 (P.L. 103-66) for funding of an array of family

preservation and family support services is laudable, this is only a drop in the bucket, unlikely to have a sizable impact on the growth of troubled families and the demand for foster care. One need only consider that the federal government will spend over \$16 billion over the same period on foster care to appreciate that the family preservation and support initiative does not represent a significant fiscal commitment to supporting families and preventing out-of-home care.

It is hard to see how the child welfare system will cope with the growing foster care crisis in the absence of both a serious attempt to reconcile existing contradictions in child welfare policy and the emergence of a political commitment to allocate the resources necessary to implement such policy changes. Of course, the lack of rigorous program evaluation research in the area of child welfare services—partly a function of minimal federal funding—leaves policymakers and administrators with little concrete guidance as to what to do even if funds were forthcoming (Curtis, 1994).

It may be that it is not even possible to reform the child welfare system within the context of our residual approach to supporting families and children (Pelton, 1989; Lindsey, 1993). We as a society have a long tradition of coming to the aid of families only when parents have "failed" in some significant way to care adequately for their children. Even then we do so grudgingly, and our efforts are feeble at best. As long as this is our approach, it is likely that we will find ourselves paying "strangers," or even more ironically, kin, much more to care for children than we will pay to support parents to care for their own.

WELFARE REFORM AND FOSTER CARE

As mentioned above, federal foster care expenditures should approximate one-quarter of federal AFDC expenditures by 1999, and the total costs nationally (i.e., federal, state, and local expenditures) of the program may be more than one-third as great as the total costs of AFDC by that time. It is quite likely that one of the most popular current public policy initiatives, "welfare reform,"

will further accelerate foster care expenditures, particularly if reform results in the reduction or elimination of benefits for poor single mothers. The vast majority of children entering foster care come from single-parent homes, and nearly half are from AFDC-eligible homes. Given the greater costs of foster care per child relative to the costs of AFDC per child, it should be clear that it will not take a very large shift of the AFDC child caseload onto the foster care caseload to threaten financial savings that the government might hope to accrue through reform efforts.

For example, what will be the net fiscal impact of one of the most popular reforms, "two years and you're out," when foster care is factored into the equation? Although there is no way to know for sure given the poor state of current knowledge, the trends described above should give pause. Poverty is the best predictor of child neglect, as well as a strong predictor of other forms of child maltreatment (Jones and McCurdy, 1992; Pelton & Milner, 1994; Sedlak, 1993). Most children placed in foster care today are there because of neglect or parental incapacity (e.g., chronic substance abuse) rather than physical or sexual abuse. Thus, many of the families who are most likely to be unable or unwilling to find work after two years of education and training are, by and large, the types of families already considered at relatively high risk of neglecting or abusing their children. Many of their children are likely to end up in foster family care or group care at much greater cost to the public than existing welfare programs.

The expansion of work requirements in the absence of the provision of adequate child care could also contribute to a movement of children from AFDC to foster care. Many current AFDC recipients do not work because they are barely able to adequately care for their children while devoting all of their time to child care. Many may end up neglecting their children to the point of endangerment when they are forced to work. In such cases it is arguably the state, rather than the parent, that is engaged in child neglect.

In the absence of significant legislative or judicial action regarding the status of kinship care, current incentives also make it likely that a large number of children from families which fare poorly under reform efforts will simply end up with extended family, at a much greater cost than AFDC. In particular, efforts to coerce single unwed mothers who are minors into living with an adult relative may contribute to pushing up the numbers of children in kinship care. "Reform" of kinship care, like reform of AFDC, is also easier said than done. Attempts to limit the growth of kinship care fly in the face of society's commitment to keep children with family, and restrict placement options for social workers to even more expensive alternatives.

Needless to say, hard-line approaches to welfare reform such as the elimination of AFDC benefits for young unmarried mothers and the placement of children in orphanages are likely to result in even more serious cost externalities than those mentioned above. It is hard to see how advocates of such ideas have given any thought whatsoever to the potential foster care costs of such actions. Even a small increase in the number of children in congregate care facilities—services which generally range in cost from \$2,000 to \$6,000 per month—could significantly offset any fiscal windfall resulting from a reduction in AFDC. This is to say nothing of the fact that institutional care of very young children—the bulk of the AFDC caseload—has been considered anathema to healthy child development for many years, even among the staunchest advocates for children's institutions.

In fact, it bears repeating that my analysis has focused almost exclusively on the fiscal implications of the foster care crisis and its relationship to welfare reform. Needless to say, this focus neglects monumental and still unanswered questions about the well-being of nearly one-half million children at any point in time: children that we as a society presume to be better able to raise than their parents can.

CONCLUSION

The growth of the number of children in foster care, the magnitude of the difficulties they bring with them into care, and the rapidly rising cost of their care should have already drawn significant attention to the crisis in the child welfare system. This has not happened. It is usually the case that the cost of a government program bears little relationship to the public or political attention it garners: witness the never-ending uproar about the relatively inexpensive AFDC program.² Perhaps the perilous relationship between foster care and its more "glamorous" forebear AFDC will finally awaken the makers and analysts of public policy to the importance of a better understanding of the foster care crisis. All other considerations aside, the ongoing debate over welfare reform must include a serious consideration of the impact of such policy and program changes on the foster care system and its clients. Furthermore, evaluations of welfare reform efforts should be required to take into account the probable impact on foster care caseloads and weigh these costs against possible benefits. Policy analysts have too long neglected the importance of foster care as a de facto poverty program. If we continue to do so during this period of public debate about the future of public assistance, we are only asking for a rude awakening at a later date.

Endnotes

¹Unless otherwise noted, data on the AFDC and child welfare services programs, including foster care, come from U.S. House of Representatives (1994).

²The AFDC, Supplemental Security Income, and Food Stamp programs combined represented .7 percent of gross domestic product and approximately 3.2 percent of the federal budget in 1990 (U.S. House of Representatives, 1994).

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