

**Keeping the Promise of a Safe Home
for Northern California's Children:
The Impact on Child Abuse and Future Crime of
Capping Federal Foster Care Funds**



A Report from FIGHT CRIME: INVEST IN KIDS *California*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

FIGHT CRIME: INVEST IN KIDS *California* is a non-profit, bipartisan anti-crime organization led by California's sheriffs, police chiefs, district attorneys and crime victims dedicated to reducing crime by promoting public investments in programs proven to keep kids from becoming involved in crime. FIGHT CRIME: INVEST IN KIDS *California* is part of the national FIGHT CRIME: INVEST IN KIDS organization.

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Executive Summary

Proposals to cap federal foster care funding would threaten the safety of abused and neglected children and public safety in Northern California. The methamphetamine epidemic and other factors continue to increase the need for foster homes in Northern California. Research shows when children are re-abused or neglected instead of being placed in safe foster homes they are more likely to become violent criminals.

Representative Wally Herger, Chairman of a U.S. House Ways and Means Subcommittee, is a central figure in congressional efforts to change how our nation treats abused and neglected children. This report discusses his proposal to cap federal payments for foster homes, focusing on the impact capping foster care would have on Northern California, including Representative Herger's 2nd Congressional District.

Thousands of victims of abuse and neglect in Northern California

In one year, from July 2003 to June 2004, 1,762 children in Northern California, including just under 1,000 children in the counties of California's 2nd Congressional District, were abused or neglected so severely that they had to be removed from their homes. As of July 1, 2004, there were a total of 3,476 children living in foster homes across the region and 2,377 children living in foster homes in the 2nd Congressional District alone. A major reason why demand for foster care is so high in Northern California is that the methamphetamine epidemic is causing more abuse and neglect of children.

Law enforcement leaders and crime victims know that safe foster homes and services are essential if abused and neglected children are to heal and grow up to be productive citizens. Safe foster homes are also necessary to protect others from future crime, because research shows that almost four out of 10 of the children who are re-abused or neglected rather than put in safe foster homes will become violent criminals.

Breaking a 25-year commitment to protect abused and neglected children

For over 25 years, the nation has maintained a commitment of assistance for each eligible abused or neglected child who needs a safe foster home. When the number of children needing a foster home increases, the federal government promises it will match the states' help for each eligible child. Now, that commitment may be abandoned, substituted with federal payments to states that would have rigid limits. Last year, Northern California Representative Wally Herger proposed a mandatory cap for all states, and he is expected to reintroduce similar legislation this year. The President's FY 2006 Budget proposes a "cap" as an option for each state.

Unlike current law's commitment to match state payments for each eligible child who needs foster care, the proposed state cap in almost all cases would not budge even when child abuse caseloads surge. However, more than three-quarters of the states had an increase in demand for foster care in at least one of the four years from 1999 to 2003, and six states, including New Jersey and Texas, had at least a third more children in foster care at the end of the four years.

Because of the methamphetamine epidemic and other challenges, Northern California has been especially hard hit. From 1998 to 2004 the region has seen a 25 percent increase in foster care caseloads, with a 20 percent increase in the counties in the 2nd Congressional District. Butte County alone has seen a 35 percent increase in the number of abused or neglected children

needing foster homes. A cap would put abused and neglected children in Northern California in particular at great risk because California's capped funding level would be relatively low, given a declining caseload level statewide. Under a cap, Northern California would be denied critical funding not only if caseloads continue to grow locally but also if foster care needs rise elsewhere in California, diverting limited funding to other parts of the state.

Capping foster care will leave Northern California unable to address increases in need due to the current methamphetamine epidemic or other future factors

The spreading national epidemic of methamphetamine and improved state efforts to identify more children who are exposed to drugs are likely to increase the need for foster care in California and many other states during the next several years. Butte County is leading the nation in this effort and it saw the number of drug-exposed children rescued in its county increase five fold – from 45 children in 1999 to 223 children in 2003.

To make matters worse, Representative Herger's anticipated legislation would actually cut foster care room and board funding in real (inflation-adjusted) dollars after the first year, putting the squeeze on foster care even in years when caseloads do not rise.

When the number of children in need of foster care exceeds the capped funding, caseworkers will find themselves between a rock and a hard place, struggling with the question: "When no safe foster home is available due to lack of funding, how high does the risk of further abuse or neglect have to be before I remove a child from a home?" The likely result: more abused and neglected children will be left in homes where they have already been beaten, sexually abused, or severely neglected. Equally troubling, the children who are removed from their homes are more likely to wind up in overcrowded or unsafe foster homes instead of the nurturing homes they so badly need if they are to heal and go on to lead healthy, productive lives.

Children who are re-abused are more likely to become violent criminals

Abused and neglected children who are re-abused because of the shortage of foster care, or who are placed in inadequate or unsafe foster care, will pay an enormous price, day after day for the rest of their lives. However, they will not be the only victims of the proposed neglect of the foster care system. Others will also pay the price. Law enforcement leaders and crime victims know that failing to protect and heal abused and neglected children sentences Northern California families to needless crime and violence. For example, research shows that when seriously abused or neglected children are left in dangerous homes and have to be placed in foster care later due to more abuse or neglect, they are 27 percent more likely to grow up to be violent criminals.

The more than 30 police chiefs, sheriffs, district attorneys, and victims of violence in California's 2nd Congressional District who are members of FIGHT CRIME: INVEST IN KIDS *California*, and the more than 300 law enforcement leader and crime victim members across California, are committed to protecting the children who cannot protect themselves and to protecting our communities from future crime. Our members are also committed to effectively combating abuse and neglect by increasing prevention efforts to keep abuse and neglect from happening in the first place, by improving services for kids already in the system and by continuing to ensure that all kids have a right to a safe home. Placing an arbitrary, rigid limit on federal foster care support for abused and neglected children is a dangerous abandonment of the commitment our country makes to our most vulnerable children.

Keeping the Promise of a Safe Home for Northern California's Children: The Impact on Child Abuse and Future Crime of Capping Federal Foster Care Funds

Most people in Northern California are aware of the severe abuse and neglect some children suffer.¹ Few people, however, realize the scope of the problem or the severity of the consequences. In 2003, there were 5,516 officially confirmed victims of child abuse or neglect in Northern California, and 1,762 children who were removed from their homes and placed in foster care in one year from July 2003 to June 2004. In the 2nd Congressional District alone, during the same time period, nearly 3,500 children were victims of abuse or neglect and 998 children were placed in foster care.²

I. Continued abuse or neglect creates violent criminals

The tragedy does not end once the abuse and neglect takes place. Though many abused and neglected children grow up to lead productive lives, children who live through abuse or neglect are far more likely than other children to be unemployed and to suffer from unstable relationships when they grow up.³ They are also two and a half times more likely than other children and adults to attempt suicide, and more likely to become criminals who prey on others.⁴ A year's toll of abuse and neglect reaches well into the future, and well beyond the initial victims.

The link between abuse and neglect and future crime

Severe abuse and neglect, particularly when

it occurs during the earliest months and years of life, can permanently injure children in ways that make them much more susceptible to engaging in violence. According to Dr. Bruce Perry, a neurobiologist and authority on brain development and children in crisis: "The systems in the human brain that allow us to form and maintain emotional relationships develop during infancy and the first years of life. ... with severe emotional neglect in early

Confirmed Victims of Abuse or Neglect in the 2nd Congressional District in 2003

County	Number of abused or neglected children
Butte	1,067
Shasta	770
Yuba	380
Tehama	289
Siskiyou	282
Sutter	274
Glenn	227
Trinity	111
Colusa	78
Total	3,478

Center for Social Sciences Research, U.C. Berkeley

childhood the impact can be devastating.”⁵ Dr. Perry explains that severely neglected children frequently respond with aggression and cruelty that “is often accompanied by a detached, cold lack of empathy.”⁶ Research shows that neglect is as likely as physical abuse to lead to future criminal behavior when a child reaches adulthood.⁷

Physical abuse can cause post-traumatic stress disorders in children. Abused children’s brains can become “stuck” in high alert with very high resting heart rates and high levels of stress hormones in their blood even when nothing is threatening them. These children are predisposed to interpret others’ actions as threatening, and are quick to respond impulsively and aggressively in their own defense.⁸ Perry warns: “The most dangerous children are created by a malignant combination of experiences. Developmental neglect and traumatic stress during childhood create violent, remorseless children.”⁹

Children who are severely and continually abused or neglected are most likely to become violent criminals

Although surveys report varying numbers, it is clear that a high percentage of criminals were abused or neglected as children. One review of the literature on prior abuse and neglect concluded that approximately half of the youths arrested for delinquency had been abused or neglected earlier in their lives.¹⁰

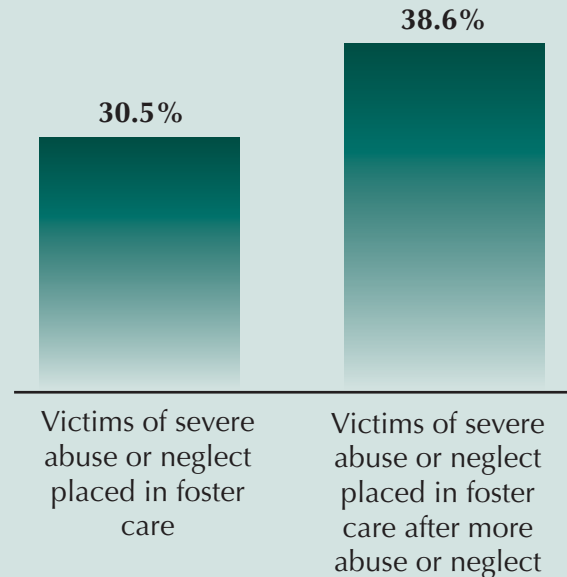
New Jersey Medical School psychologist Dr. Cathy Spatz Widom located individuals who had been abused or neglected as children and compared them to otherwise similar individuals who had no official record of abuse

“Developmental neglect and traumatic stress during childhood create violent, remorseless children.”

Dr. Bruce Perry

Continued Abuse Creates Violent Criminals

Seriously abused or neglected children left in dangerous homes, who have to be placed in foster care after being re-abused or neglected, are **27% more likely to become violent criminals** than children placed directly in foster care.



English, Widom, and Brandford

or neglect. By studying the subsequent arrest records and controlling for other demographic risk factors, Dr. Widom found that being abused or neglected almost doubles the odds that a child will commit a crime as a juvenile.¹¹

The more severe the abuse or neglect and the longer it takes place, the more likely children are to become violent criminals. A recent study conducted in Washington State by Dr. Diana English, Dr. Cathy Spatz Widom, and Carol Brandford looked at children whose abuse or neglect was serious enough that the state legally took over temporary custody of the children from their parents and placed the children directly into foster care. Fully three out of 10 of these children (30.5 percent) were later arrested as juveniles or as adults for at least one violent crime.

Re-abused children are 27 percent more likely to become violent criminals

The researchers also studied children who had been seriously abused or neglected and

were temporarily removed from the legal custody of their parents, but who were not placed directly into foster care. Some of those children who stayed in their homes were re-abused or neglected and then they were placed in foster care. These re-abused or neglected children were even more likely to grow up to become violent criminals than the children who were immediately placed in foster care. Almost four out of 10 of these re-abused or neglected children (38.6 percent) became violent criminals. The study is a warning that leaving abused or neglected children in dangerous homes — a far more likely occurrence when adequate numbers of safe foster homes are unavailable — further increases by 27 percent the risk that the children will become violent criminals.¹²

II. Rigid caps on foster care would leave Northern California children in dangerous homes

Eliminating the nation’s current commitment to help each eligible abused and neglected child and substituting it with a rigid capped payment to states would leave many states

with a shortfall in funding for foster homes for victims of abuse or neglect.

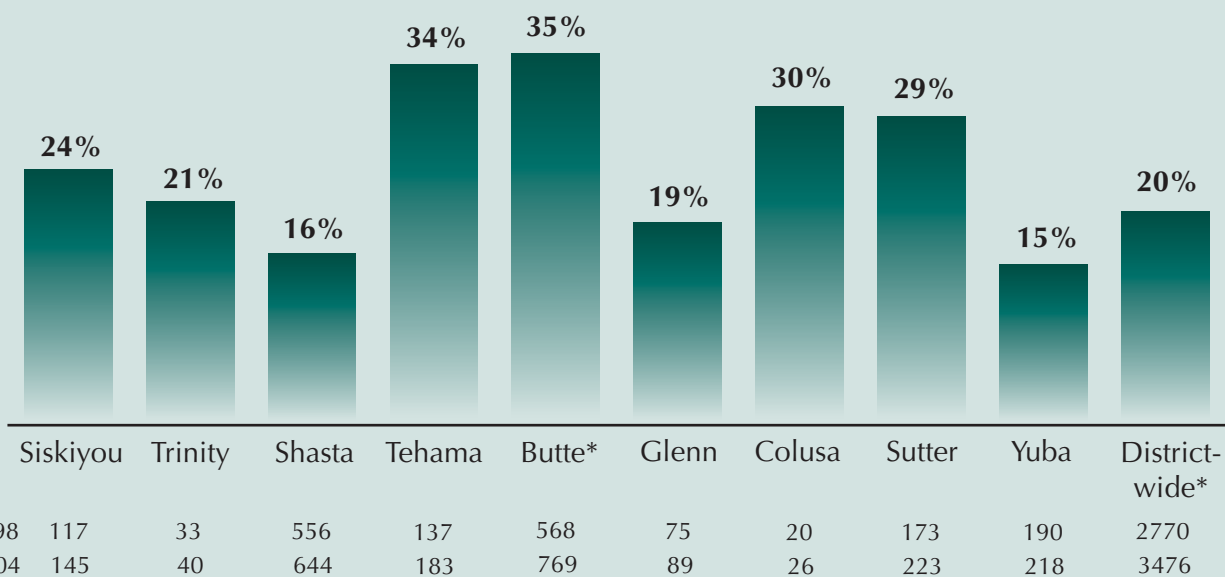
The numbers of abused or neglected children are likely to increase beyond an inflexible capped federal payment in many states for multiple reasons. Many localities, including the counties in Northern California, have already faced a growing epidemic of methamphetamine use that has led to more victims of abuse or neglect. Additionally, counties are improving their response systems in ways that will increase the number of children identified as needing foster care. If foster care payments to states are capped, quality and safety problems with foster homes would increase as funding declines. Capping federal foster care payments would also cause more children who are known to be at high risk of further abuse and neglect to be left in dangerous homes instead of being placed in safe foster homes.

A foster care cap fails abused and neglected children when caseloads increase

The proposed capped payment to states in

Number of Children in Foster Care Increasing in Northern California

Percentage Increases in the 2nd Congressional District (1998 to 2004)



*Not all of Butte County is in the district, and Yolo County is excluded from this chart because the most populous areas in the county are not in this district.

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last year's legislation by Representative Herger, which is expected to be re-introduced this year, would not provide adequate funding to address fluctuating foster care caseloads, except in rare circumstances.¹³ Nationally, there was a slight decline overall in foster care caseloads in the last four years for which data is available (1999 to 2003). However, if Representative Herger's proposal had been put in place sometime between the years 1999 and 2003, most states would have faced shortfalls in federal funding.¹⁴

- More than three-quarters of the states had an increase in demand for foster care in at least one of the four years from 1999 to 2003.¹⁵
- A quarter of the states had increases of over 10 percent in at least one of the four years.¹⁶
- Six states, including New Jersey and Texas, had caseloads that were at least a third larger in 2003 than they were in 1999.¹⁷

The good news in California is that the overall foster care caseloads have declined 22 percent.¹⁸ However, this would mean that California's capped funding level would be set at a relatively low level, although counties in Northern California have been experiencing significant increases in the need for foster homes in recent years. In the period from 1998 to 2004 foster care caseloads went up 25 percent in Northern California, and 20 percent in the 2nd Congressional District. Butte County alone has seen a 35 percent increase in its need for foster homes since 1998.¹⁹ Northern California would be denied critical funding not only if caseloads continue to surge locally, but also if foster care needs rise elsewhere in California, diverting limited funding to other parts of the state.

The capped foster care payment would decline over time placing more children at risk

The proposed capped payment to states in the legislation introduced last year by

Representative Herger only matched the inflation rate the first year and in real, inflation adjusted numbers was set to decline in subsequent years.²⁰ Representative Herger recently acknowledged that the funding amounts discussed last year may be cut even further when the legislation is offered this year due to increased budget constraints.²¹

To make matters worse, capped block grants historically are cut over time. According to the Urban Institute:

The real value of block grant funding tends to diminish over time. A study of five ... block grants [from 1986 to 1995] found that the real value of four of them decreased. ... A more recent analysis of 11 block grants found that from their establishment to the present, real federal funding fell by an average of 11 percent.²²

Therefore, even if caseloads stay at current levels, states may soon have insufficient funds to help all of their abused and neglected children. The quality and safety of foster care placements would be jeopardized by lower funding, which would cause qualified foster parents to leave the system, to be replaced, if they are replaced at all, by less qualified foster parents. The lack of high-quality foster care parents or the simple lack of foster homes would mean that many children would face being left in dangerous homes.

The methamphetamine epidemic is increasing the need for foster homes

The need for foster homes is heavily influenced by epidemics of drug abuse. The crack epidemic in America produced a rising wave of abuse and neglect as addicted parents fed their drug habits while neglecting or abusing their children. According to a U.S. General Accounting Office study of New York City, Los Angeles, and Philadelphia, "The percentage of young foster children estimated to have been prenatally exposed to cocaine increased significantly, from 17 percent in 1986 to 55 percent in 1991."²³ While the more rural counties of the 2nd Congressional District were

“We have had an increase in children coming into the foster care system due to increased meth use in our county.”

**Randi Gottlieb, Program Manager,
Child Welfare Services, Tehama
County Department of Social Services**

not as immediately impacted by that wave of cocaine abuse, they too were affected.

More recently, the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) reported that, “Methamphetamine is the primary drug threat in California.”²⁴ Statewide, fully five percent of California 11th-grade students surveyed in the 2001-2002 school year reported current use of methamphetamine.²⁵ Since then, the percent of admissions for treatment statewide that are primarily methamphetamine related have risen from 22 percent in 2001 to 31 percent in 2003.²⁶

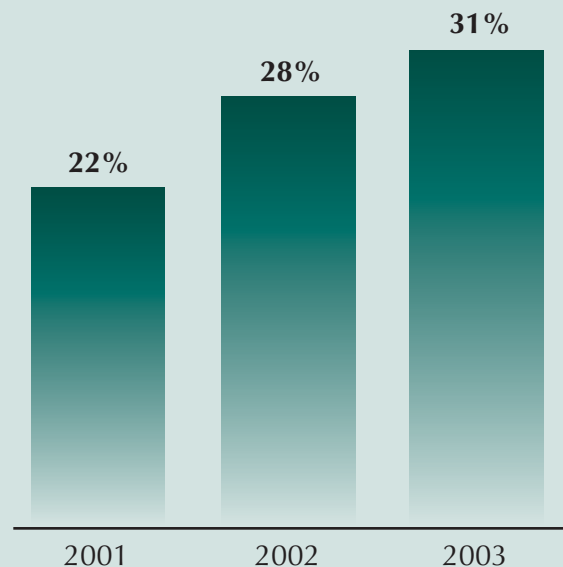
The scourge of methamphetamine addiction has not bypassed the counties of the 2nd Congressional District. Admissions to treatment centers for methamphetamine addiction from 2001/2002 to 2002/2003 jumped in Butte County by 43 percent and the data for Sutter and Yuba counties combined showed that admissions more than doubled in just that one year.²⁷ In Shasta County, the number of people charged for methamphetamine possession has risen 24 percent from 497 in 2000 to 616 in 2004.

The impact on children has mainly been reported in terms of children rescued from methamphetamine labs run by addicts in their own homes. In a January 27th, 2005 article titled “Methamphetamine scourge sweeps rural America,” the Reuters news agency reported, “In thousands of cases, people have been caught cooking the highly toxic chemicals in homes where children were present, breathing

the poisonous fumes.”²⁸ National Public Radio reported in a story on “Meth Orphans” that when children are removed from these homes they “are scrubbed down and changed into clean clothes. They take nothing with them, no books, no stuffed animals, because everything is contaminated.”²⁹

The DEA and local law enforcement are beginning to show success in closing down the small labs that directly endanger children in many counties. But that does not mean the methamphetamine problem has ended. In a series of articles on nationwide methamphetamine trends in *The Oregonian*, Steve Suo wrote that the local small-time producers are not responsible for the bulk of methamphetamine being distributed in big cities and small towns across the United States. Large-scale labs in California and Mexico are responsible for the majority of methamphetamine that is reaching the streets throughout the country.³⁰ In fact, the DEA reported in 2003 that “Over the past year [the people running these large labs] have moved their laboratories to Northern California locations and Mexico to avoid increased law

The Proportion of Methamphetamine Addicts Among all Drug Addicts Seeking Treatment Statewide is Rising



U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

enforcement pressure” in the areas of California where they originally set up their large operations.³¹ Along with coping with the increase in addicts and shutting down small local labs, Northern California law enforcement officers must also now become involved in trying to find and shut down these larger labs. The DEA reports that methamphetamine from these large labs “continues to flood the market.”³² Unfortunately, Suo reports that currently “the most recent statistics on meth use show the number of addicts is rising, along with drug purity, suggesting the traffickers have found other overseas sources of supply” for the raw materials used to make methamphetamine.³³

The impact on children of methamphetamine is not limited to being exposed to the deadly chemicals and fumes in the smaller home labs. Methamphetamine is highly addictive. The National Institutes of Health reports, “Immediately after smoking or intravenous injection, the methamphetamine user experiences an intense sensation, called a ‘rush’ or ‘flash,’ that lasts only a few minutes and is described as extremely pleasurable. Users may become addicted quickly, and use it with increasing frequency and in increasing doses.”³⁴ Parents are exposing children to the drugs if they smoke the methamphetamine; they are also exposing their children to the poverty, conflicts and crime that so often engulf

the lives of addicts. Far too often parents simply walk away and leave their children.

Northern California a leader in identifying drug exposed children

Butte County detective Sue Webber-Brown has become nationally renowned for her work in setting up a Task Force on Drug Endangered Children (DEC). At least 14 other counties throughout the state and 10 other states are using the DEC model.³⁵ According to an article on her efforts in the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, Webber-Brown and her colleagues found that “Nobody was treating the children as victims” and the children found in meth labs were too often returning to dangerous homes.

If the parents [were] bailed out of jail to await formal charges, ... children commonly would be returned to filthy homes still rife with drug paraphernalia or lacking electricity. Now, through Butte County’s DEC program, all children found at the site of a meth lab — regardless of whether they’re among the 30 percent who test positive for the drug — go through juvenile court dependency proceedings to determine the best placement for them. A relative may be appointed or the child may go into foster care.

The Walk Away Drug:

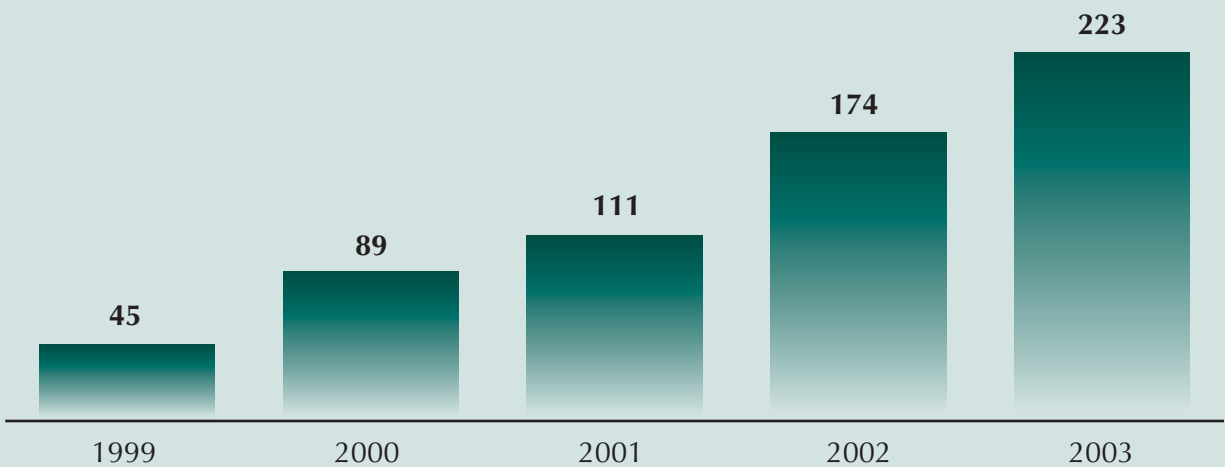
Before she left, 18-year-old Samantha Zeller stole across the silence of a suburban home and taped a note to her mother’s bedroom door.

“I love you, don’t worry,” she wrote. When Rhonda Zeller awoke, she found her daughter had left something else behind: her 1-year-old son. Samantha reappeared the day he turned 2, only to walk out again while the birthday boy cried for his mother to stay. Each time she left, he would stand at the door screaming, “Mommy, no, don’t go, please don’t go.” She would go anyway. “That’s when I knew how horrible this drug must be,” Rhonda said. “She loved him more than life.”

The drug was methamphetamine. Judges and child-protection workers call it the scourge of parenthood. They label it the “walk away” drug, because that’s what parents do.

David Olinger, December 28, 2004,
Meth Crisis Soars in Colorado: Addicted parents neglect or abandon kids, *The Denver Post*

Fivefold Increase in Drug-endangered Children Rescued in Butte County



Butte Interagency Narcotics Task Force

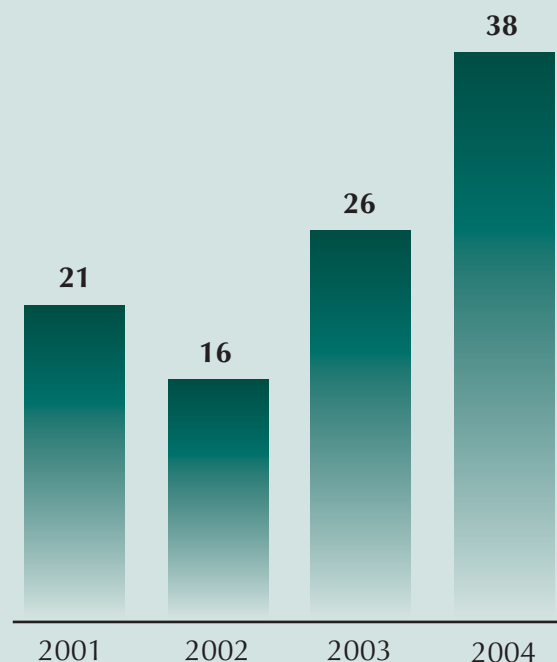
To regain custody, parents must comply with random drug testing once a week, attend parenting classes, drug rehabilitation and counseling, and submit to supervised visitations with their children. They also face criminal charges for child endangerment and meth manufacturing.³⁶

Webber-Brown's team is discovering that, now that they are systematically checking for drug-endangered children, they are finding increasing numbers of children exposed to methamphetamine or other drugs. Whether it is due to increasing addiction, increased task force surveillance, or both, the numbers of children who are identified as having been drug endangered by someone involved in manufacturing and/or using and distributing methamphetamine or other controlled substances has risen sharply since 1999. The task force rescued 45 children in that year and the numbers have climbed every year since then. In 2003, the latest year for which complete data is available, there were 223 drug-endangered children rescued.³⁷ Shasta County, which also set up a DEC task force, reported 38 children testing positive for methamphetamine in 2004, up from 16 in 2002.³⁸

Unfortunately there are other risks for California children on the horizon. The DEA's

California fact sheet for 2005 says, "The increased availability of high purity heroin that can be snorted allows a new, younger population to use heroin without a syringe and needle. Drug treatment specialists stated that these new heroin users ingest large amounts of heroin and become quickly addicted." The U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services

More Children Testing Positive for Methamphetamine in Shasta County



Shasta County Drug Endangered Children Program

Administration (SAMHSA), reports that heroin treatment admissions have grown from 168,000 in 1992 to 284,000 in 2002.³⁹ Law enforcement and child protective service workers in rural Northern California counties cannot afford to be complacent about heroin. Dr. Ric Curtis of John Jay College reports “heroin is not just an inner-city problem anymore. It is spreading to suburban and even rural areas across the country.”⁴⁰

The National Institutes of Health warns that, beside the well-known addictive qualities of heroin, its use during pregnancy can lead to low birth weight babies who are at risk of suffering from developmental delays.⁴¹

Whether it is the current rise in methamphetamine addiction or future drug epidemics that threaten to deliver more children who will need foster homes, if federal funding for foster homes is capped, instead of growing to meet the need, funding for foster homes would erode over time and abused or neglected children would pay the price.

Additional factors likely to increase the need for foster homes:

1. Improving efforts to identify abused and neglected children

The Third National Incidence Study of Child Abuse and Neglect, a congressionally mandated study undertaken by the National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect, concluded that the true number of children abused or neglected nationally each year is three times the officially recognized number.⁴²

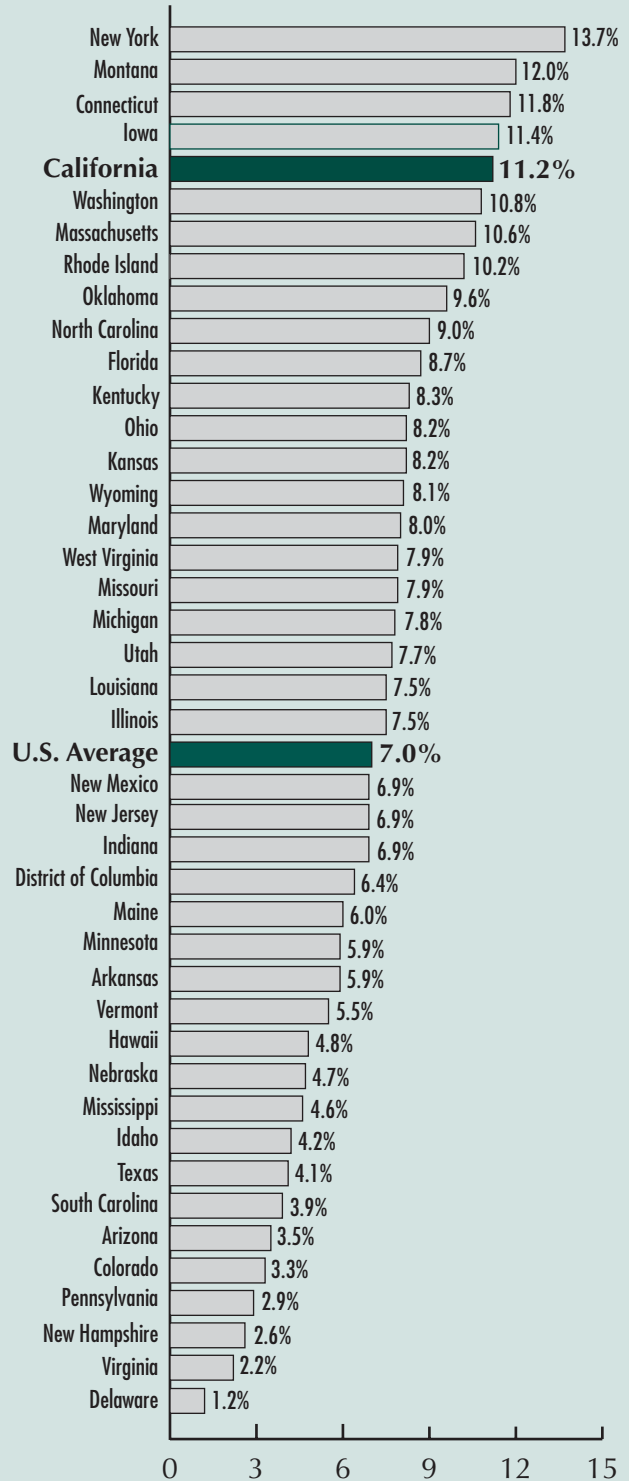
Across the United States, as more counties and states follow Butte County’s example and set up task forces for drug exposed children, they are likely to find that there are many more children who need protection than are currently being identified through their usual child protective services process.

2. Determining that more foster homes are needed to reduce re-abuse or neglect

Re-abuse and neglect of children originally

California's Child Abuse or Neglect Victims Suffer Re-abuse or Neglect More Often Than the Victims in Most Other States

Reoccurrence of maltreatment within six months among all victims of abuse or neglect in 2002



States not reporting this data: Alabama, Alaska, Georgia, Nevada, North Dakota, Oregon, South Dakota, Tennessee, and Wisconsin

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

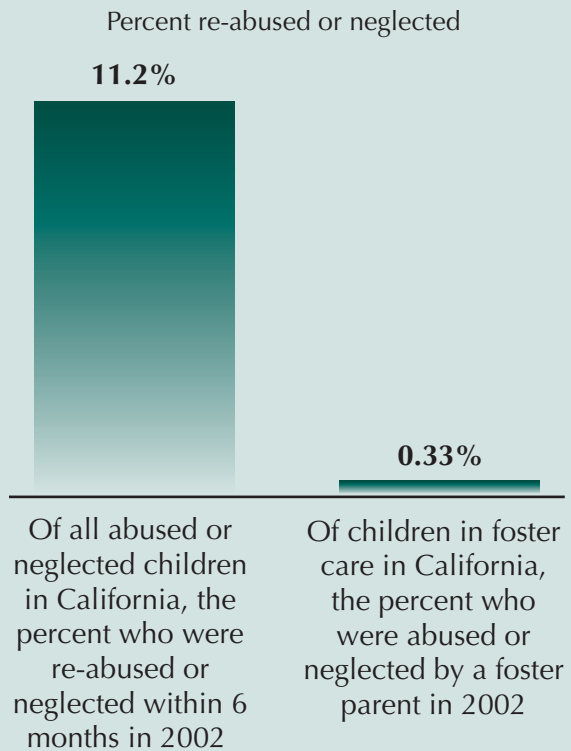
identified as victims of abuse is a continuing problem, particularly for kids who are returned to abusive homes. The public may typically be unaware that fewer than a third of abused or neglected children in California are removed from their families and placed in foster homes even temporarily.⁴³ Re-abuse and neglect is particularly a problem in California, which has a higher rate of re-abuse and neglect than should be expected, according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.⁴⁴ Part of the solution may be to place more highly at-risk children in safe foster homes.

There were 5,516 children in Northern California, including nearly 3,500 children in the counties of the 2nd Congressional District, who were confirmed victims of abuse or neglect in 2003.⁴⁵ Some people assume that foster homes are more dangerous than the homes from which children were removed. Except in a few, highly publicized incidents, that is not the case. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services reports that in 2002, 11.2 percent of all victims of abuse and neglect statewide in California were re-abused or neglected within six months – typically by the people who originally abused or neglected them. Only four states reported worse rates of re-abuse and neglect. That compares with a rate of abuse or neglect statewide by foster parents over a whole year of one-third of one percent (0.33 percent). The rate of re-abuse or neglect for all victims of abuse or neglect is thus 34 times the rate experienced in foster homes.⁴⁶

California also has a higher rate of children re-entering foster care than should be expected, according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.⁴⁷ Children typically re-enter foster care because they have been re-abused or neglected after being returned to their families.

As California addresses the problem of re-abuse and neglect, the need for more foster care placements in the state could rise. Capped foster care funding, however, will not accommodate such changes designed to better

Most Re-abuse or Neglect of Children In California Does Not Take Place in Foster Homes



Child Maltreatment 2002
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

protect children.

3. Conducting better outreach to homeless youth

Improved efforts to help homeless youth would increase the need for foster homes. More than 100,000 youth run away from home each year in California.⁴⁸ Comparable figures for Northern California are not available, but a survey of homeless people in Shasta County in 2003 found that there are over 4,500 homeless individuals in the county. If an estimate generated by the U.S. Conference of Mayors is accurate, over 100 of those homeless individuals are unaccompanied homeless youths in Shasta County alone.⁴⁹

The National Network for Youth reports that many homeless youth are fleeing abusive homes and that “across studies of homeless youth, rates of sexual abuse range from 17 to 53 percent, and physical abuse range from 40

to 60 percent.”⁵⁰ To help more of these youths, Northern California will need more safe foster homes in place of the unsafe homes from which many of the children fled.

Capping foster care could increase the number of youths on the streets

Instead of promoting better care for homeless youth, a capped foster care payment could lead to more children running away from home. Older children will respond to being sent back to abusive or neglectful homes by simply running away. More children escaping harm on their own will further strain the overburdened services for runaway youth, as these abused or neglected children find their way to California’s streets. The National Coalition for the Homeless reports that, “Because of their age, homeless youth have few legal means by which they can earn enough money to meet basic needs. Many homeless adolescents find that exchanging sex for food, clothing, and shelter is their only chance of survival on the streets. ... It has been reported that the HIV prevalence for homeless youth may be as much as 2 to 10 times higher than the rates reported for other samples of adolescents in the United States.”⁵¹

III. Capping foster care risks returning children to their abusers, and will not prevent abuse or neglect from happening in the first place

Evidence shows that the intense need to meet the emergencies of abused and neglected children swamps prevention efforts. There are programs that are effective at preventing child abuse and neglect from happening in the first place, but their success can only be assured with separate, dedicated funding. Without dedicated funding both efforts to protect children are undermined:

- Abandoning the commitment to children would leave states with not enough or dangerously inadequate foster homes when demand for foster homes

goes up, leading to higher rates of re-abuse and neglect.

- Failure to ensure primary prevention funding is a missed opportunity to stem the flow of new children into the system.

Prevention, not just treatment, of abuse and neglect could work but is severely underfunded

Research has shown that in-home parent coaching for at-risk parents before and after the birth of their first child can significantly reduce abuse and neglect. The Nurse Family Partnership program in Elmira, NY randomly assigned at-risk pregnant women to receive in-home visits by nurses or to be in a control group. The nurses coach the expectant mothers in parenting and other skills, continuing until their child is age 2. Children whose mothers were left out of the program were five times more likely to be abused or neglected than children whose mothers received parent coaching. Children of mothers left out had twice as many arrests by age 15 as the children of mothers who received home visits.⁵² When this program was later replicated in Memphis, eight of the 465 children in the study whose parents did not receive in-home parent coaching had fractures and/or head trauma requiring hospitalizations, while none of the 206 children whose parents received the program were hospitalized for such injuries.⁵³ An additional replication underway in Denver has also produced strong results.⁵⁴

There is no question that it is possible to reduce abuse and neglect. In California there are Nurse Family Partnership programs in Fresno, Kern, Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, Sacramento, San Diego, and Santa Clara counties, but none yet in Northern California. Parents as Teachers, another in-home parent coaching program, does have sites in Redding, Chico, and Red Bluff, and has many other sites around the state. And, Healthy Families America is active in the state with a number of sites in the general Sacramento area and another in Antelope Valley. To fully realize the

potential of the parent coaching approach, however, the available research shows that much more needs to be done in California. First, all those in need of services must receive them and, second, the quality of the programs must be consistently high enough to achieve the full potential of the approach. For example, it is important to continue striving to ensure that, whenever possible, all new parents are enrolled in the program before the birth of their child, and to ensure that every parent coach is highly trained at identifying and helping parents with the problems that are most likely to lead to the abuse or neglect of their children.⁵⁵

New proposals are unlikely to lead to meaningful declines in abuse and neglect

Unfortunately, under the Herger proposal, large increases in funding to prevent child abuse in the first place (“primary prevention”) are unlikely because the day-to-day responsibilities of child protection agencies would not change. Child welfare agencies in California and across the United States are obligated to provide services, monitoring, and care to the children who are already harmed. States need additional money for primary prevention to stop abuse and neglect from happening in the first place because they will not be able to redirect significant amounts of funding from children already abused or neglected. A study by the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) confirmed that unless federal funding is specifically directed at primary prevention efforts, it goes overwhelmingly for those who are already victims of abuse and neglect.⁵⁶

California is now facing financial pressures that will limit its ability to widely provide in-home parent coaching for at-risk parents. Without a more concerted effort to directly fund primary prevention efforts, the goal of reducing abuse and neglect is unlikely to be realized under the current proposals.

Of course improvements in assessing the needs of children who are already abused and

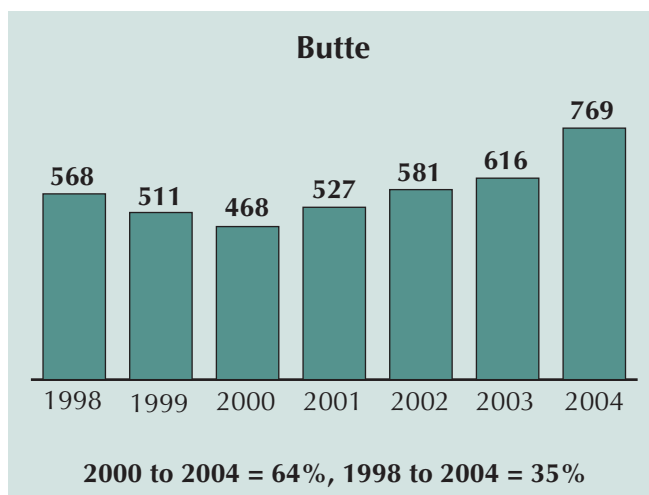
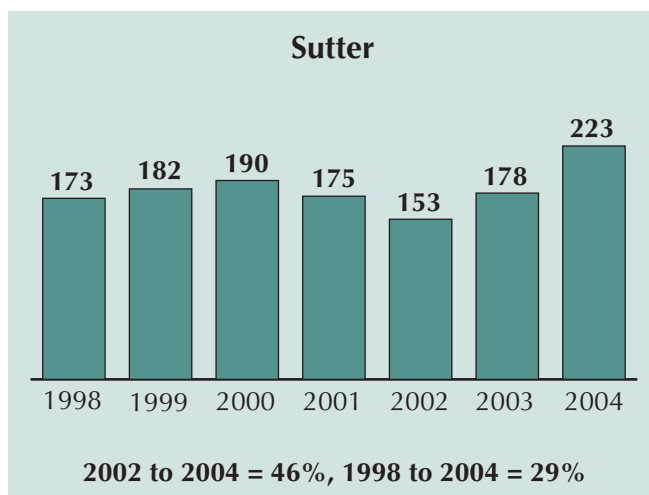
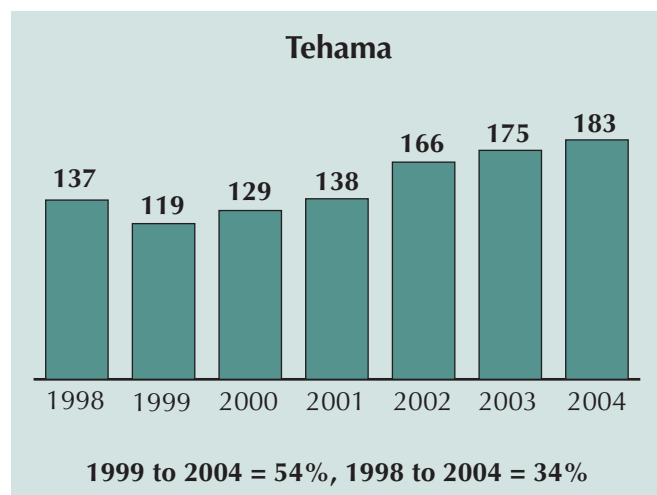
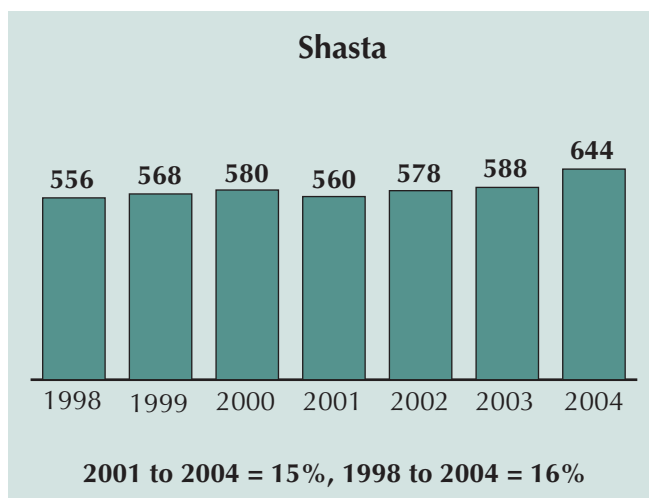
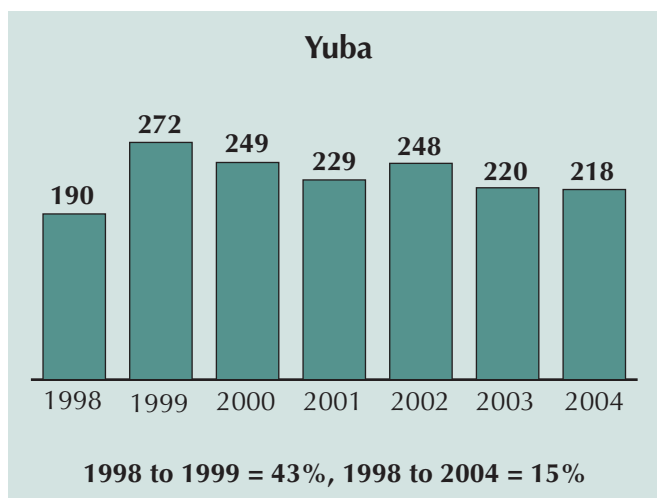
neglected and providing them and their caregivers with necessary services are wise investments.⁵⁷ Those changes are needed to help the children heal, to prevent more re-abuse and neglect, and to prevent the harm that has already been done from spreading to the broader community through increased crime and violence. However, since the number of children abused or neglected again is a relatively small portion of the total number of cases of abuse and neglect that take place each year, only improving the treatment of those already abused and neglected will not lead to large declines in overall abuse and neglect. Only primary prevention of abuse and neglect can do that. To effectively combat abuse and neglect, we need to increase primary prevention efforts to keep abuse and neglect from happening in the first place, to improve services for kids already in the system, and to continue to ensure that all kids have a right to a safe home. Each of these is essential.

IV. Conclusion: Abandoning the national commitment to provide abused or neglected children with safe foster homes would increase abuse and neglect and future violent crime

Abandoning the national foster care commitment to the children in Northern California who were abused and neglected threatens that there will not be enough safe homes when these children need them. If the support for children needing foster care is capped, when demand for foster homes goes up either the quality and safety of foster homes will be jeopardized, or more children will be returned to dangerous homes. The research shows that returning severely abused or neglected children to unsafe homes can lead to 27 percent more of the children becoming violent criminals if they later have to be placed in foster care. This is not just a tragedy for the abused and neglected children: it places our communities at increased risk from violent crime.

Appendix

Foster care caseloads by year in five counties of the 2nd Congressional District showing large fluctuations, including 15% to 35% increases from 1998 to 2004



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Endnotes

- ¹ For the purposes of this report, Northern California refers only to these counties: Butte, Colusa, Del Norte, Glenn, Humboldt, Lake, Lassen, Mendocino, Modoc, Nevada, Plumas, Shasta, Sierra, Siskiyou, Sutter, Tehama, Trinity, and Yuba.
- ² Needell, B., Webster, D., Cuccaro-Alamin, S., Armijo, M., Lee, S., Lery, B., et al. (2005). *Child Welfare Services Reports for California*. Retrieved March 18, 2005 from University of California at Berkeley Center for Social Services Research website: <http://cssr.berkeley.edu/CWSCMSreports>
- ³ Widom, C. S. (2000). *Childhood victimization: Early adversity, later psychopathology*. Retrieved from the National Criminal Justice Reference Service Web site: www.ncjrs.org/pdffiles1/jr000242b.pdf. Individuals not abused or neglected as children were 40 percent more likely to be employed, and 50 percent more likely to have stable marriages.
- ⁴ Widom, C. S. (2000). *Childhood victimization: Early adversity, later psychopathology*. Retrieved from the National Criminal Justice Reference Service Web site: www.ncjrs.org/pdffiles1/jr000242b.pdf
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- ⁶ Perry, B. D. (2002). *Bonding and attachment in maltreated children: Consequences of emotional neglect in childhood*. ChildTrauma Academy Press, 3, 1-30.
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- ⁹ Perry, B. D. (1997). Incubated in terror: Neurodevelopmental factors in the 'cycle of violence.' In J. Osofsky (Ed.), *Children in a Violent Society* (pp. 124-148). New York: Guilford Press.
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- ¹⁴ The current increase in funding for the Herger bill (H.R. 4856 introduced last year) barely meets the inflation rate in the first year and in subsequent years the increases in funding will be smaller every year while the inflation rate is likely to stay the same or increase. Therefore, the shortfall in funding in real dollars is anticipated to grow each year.
- ¹⁵ The figure in this bullet is for states that had at least a 1% increase in a given year. If the figure was calculated for states having any increase at all, 41 of 52 states would have qualified.
- ¹⁶ This figure in this bullet did not include states with over 20% increases in caseloads for any year because the Herger bill is expected to allow states to be reimbursed if their caseloads grow above 20% in one year.
- ¹⁷ The figures for all three bullets are from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Administration on Children, Youth, and Families. Children's Bureau. (2004, August). *Foster Care FY1999 - FY2003 entries, exits, and numbers of children in care on the last day of each federal fiscal year*. Retrieved from <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/dis/tables/entryexit2002.htm>
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