

Promoting Safe and Stable Families Program



This document was updated by the National Child Welfare Center for Innovation and Advancement in 2025.

The Promoting Safe and Stable Families (PSSF) Program is a federal program aimed at preventing child maltreatment, enabling children to remain safely with their families, and ensuring permanency for children in foster care. The program supports state child welfare agencies and eligible Tribes in establishing and operating integrated, community-based services for families. Administered by the Children's Bureau, the program includes both mandatory and discretionary funding components.

PSSF Program Purpose and Objectives

As outlined in Title IV-B, subpart 2 of the Social Security Act, 11 42 U.S.C. § 629 (see [Compilation of Titles IV-B, IV-E, and Related Sections of the Social Security Act](#)), the purpose of PSSF is to enable states and Tribes to operate a coordinated program of community-based services for the following objectives:

- ▶ To ensure children's safety within the home and preserve intact families in which children have been maltreated when the family's problems can be addressed effectively (**family preservation services**)
- ▶ To prevent child maltreatment among families at risk through the provision of supportive family services (**family support services**)
- ▶ To address the problems of families whose children have been placed in foster care so that reunification may occur in a safe and stable manner (**family reunification services**)
- ▶ To support adoptive families by providing support services as necessary so that they can make a lifetime commitment to their children (**adoption promotion and support services**)

Overview of the PSSF Program

This fact sheet presents:

- ▶ Program Purpose and Objectives
- ▶ Legislative History
- ▶ Formula Grants
- ▶ Program Plans
- ▶ Requirements for Funding Allocation
- ▶ Definitions
- ▶ Contact Information

Detailed definitions for each of these service areas begin on page 4.

Legislative History

PSSF's history began in 1993, when the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act created subpart 2 of Title IV-B of the Social Security Act and established the Family Preservation and Support Services Program. Responding to concerns over the number of children in foster care, Congress created this capped entitlement program to provide states with funding for prevention services that support families before children entered out-of-home care. In addition to funding Family Preservation and Support Services Grants, the program established the Court Improvement Program.

In 1998, the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) reauthorized and renamed the program to the Promoting Safe and Stable Families Program. In line with ASFA's emphasis on promoting permanency for children and youth in foster care, the PSSF Program was expanded to also include time-limited family reunification services for families with children in foster care and adoption promotion and support services.

The PSSF Program was reauthorized by the PSSF amendments of 2001, the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005, and the Child and Family Services Improvement Act of 2006. During that time, discretionary funding streams were added to the initial mandatory funding. Changes included increased PSSF funding for Tribes; set-aside funding for monthly caseworker visits to children in foster care; and competitive Regional Partnership Grants to improve outcomes for children with parents with substance use disorders.

The Family First Transition Act (P. L. 116–94) renamed the program the “MaryLee Allen Promoting Safe and Stable Families Program.” The Supporting America's Children and Families Act of 2025 (P. L. 118–258) reauthorized appropriations for the program through fiscal year (FY) 2029.

The PSSF Program must be periodically reauthorized. Congress can prescribe changes to the program and funding amounts. The Program is normally reauthorized on a 5-year cycle.

Key PSSF legislation is shown in the timeline in exhibit 1.

Exhibit 1: Timeline of PSSF Legislative History



PSSF Formula Grants

Mandatory PSSF funds are distributed to states, territories, and Tribes through formula grants. Funding to states and territories is based on the jurisdiction's share of children receiving benefits through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, a federal program supporting low-income families. The law requires that states and Tribes provide a 25 percent match. (Requirements for allocation of funding are discussed below.)

Three percent of the PSSF mandatory funds and discretionary funds are reserved for distribution to Tribes and Tribal consortia that have submitted a PSSF plan. Allotments to Tribes are based on the number of children in each Tribe as a proportion of the total number of children under age 21 in Tribes with submitted and approved plans. To receive a grant, a Tribe must have an allocation of \$10,000 or more. Around 141 Tribes receive PSSF funding annually.

PSSF Program Plans

States and Tribes must submit plans with intended goals for their PSSF programs. These plans must reflect collaboration and engagement of partners in planning processes. As required under title IV-B, plans for the PSSF Program must be integrated into each state or Tribal agency's 5-year Child and Family Services Plan (CFSP) and Annual Progress and Services Report (APSR), due June 30.

The Children's Bureau's Regional Offices are responsible for reviewing and recommending approval of the CFSPs and APSRs for the states and Tribes in their Region.

Requirements for Funding Allocation

Title IV-B subpart 2 requires that states and Tribes spend "significant portions of expenditures" on PSSF services. No more than 10 percent of expenditures can be directed toward administrative costs.

At least 20 percent of a state's allotment is required to support each of the following service areas:¹

- ▶ Family preservation services
- ▶ Family support services
- ▶ Family reunification services
- ▶ Adoption promotion and support services

Planned Expenditures

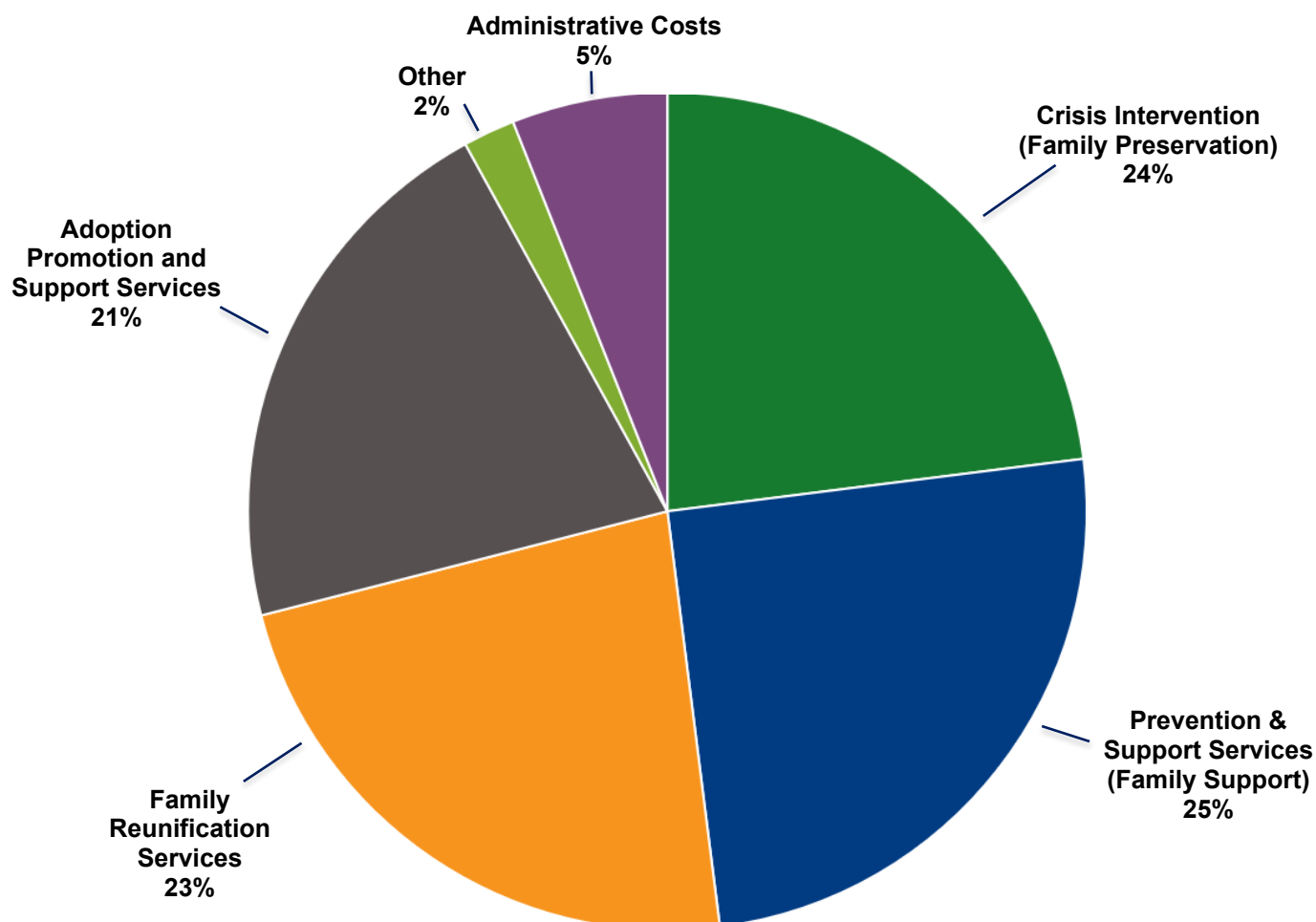
Exhibit 2 illustrates the percent of funds that states planned to use for each service area category in FY 2024, based on an aggregate of each state's estimated annual expenditures. As shown, planned expenditures for family support services (25 percent of funds), family preservation (24 percent), and family reunification services (23 percent) are slightly greater than for adoption promotion and support services (21 percent). There is some variation across states in the percent of funds spent in each category.

Tools and Program Instructions for Plans

- ▶ Children's Bureau State Toolkit:
<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/programs/state-tribal-cfsp/state-toolkit>
- ▶ Children's Bureau Program Instructions:
<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/laws-policies/program-instructions>

¹ States can apply to their Regional Office for an exception to the funding allocations if they have already spent significant amounts of federal or states monies in one of the designated areas and have an established, robust program providing services.

Exhibit 2: FY 2024 PSSF Planned Expenditures



Definitions

Presented below are descriptions as defined by law of each of the four service areas.²

Family preservation services are services for children and families designed to help families (including adoptive and extended families) at risk or in crisis, including:

- ▶ Service programs to help children:
 - Return to families from which they have been removed, where safe and appropriate
 - Find placement through adoption or with a legal guardian
 - Find placement in some other planned, permanent living arrangement if adoption or legal guardianship is determined not to be safe and appropriate for a child
- ▶ Pre-placement preventive services programs, such as intensive family preservation programs, designed to help children at risk of foster care placement remain safely with their families
- ▶ Service programs designed to provide follow-up care to families to whom a child has been returned after a foster care placement
- ▶ Respite care of children to provide temporary relief for parents and other caregivers (including foster parents)

² As defined in the Social Security Act, Title IV-B, subpart 2, Section 431 (42 U.S.C. § 629a)

- ▶ Services designed to improve parenting skills (by reinforcing parents' confidence in their strengths, and helping them to identify where improvement is needed and to obtain assistance in improving those skills) with respect to matters such as child development, family budgeting, coping with stress, health, and nutrition
- ▶ Infant safe-haven programs to provide a way for a parent to safely relinquish a newborn infant at a safe haven designated pursuant to a state law

Family support services are community-based services designed to:

- ▶ Promote the safety and well-being of children and families
- ▶ Increase the strength and stability of families
- ▶ Increase parents' confidence and competence in their parenting abilities
- ▶ Support and retain foster families so they can provide quality family-based settings for children in foster care
- ▶ Provide children a safe, stable, and supportive family environment
- ▶ Strengthen parental relationships and promote healthy marriages
- ▶ Enhance child development (including through mentoring)

Family reunification services are the services and activities provided to a child that is removed from the child's home and placed in a foster family home or a child care institution or a child who has been returned home and to the parents or primary caregiver of such a child, to facilitate the reunification of the child safely and appropriately within a timely fashion and to ensure the strength and stability of the reunification. In the case of a child who has been returned home, the services and activities shall only be provided during the 15-month period that begins on the date that the child returns home. These services and activities include:

- ▶ Individual, group, and family counseling
- ▶ Inpatient, residential, or outpatient substance abuse treatment services
- ▶ Mental health services
- ▶ Assistance to address domestic violence
- ▶ Services designed to provide temporary child care and therapeutic services for families, including crisis nurseries
- ▶ Peer-to-peer mentoring and support groups for parents and primary caregivers
- ▶ Services and activities designed to facilitate access to and visitation of children by parents and siblings
- ▶ Transportation to or from any of the family reunification services and activities described above

Adoption promotion and support services are services and activities designed to encourage more adoptions out of the foster care system, when adoption promotes the best interests of children, including such activities as:

- ▶ Pre- and postadoptive services and activities designed to expedite the adoption process and support adoptive families

This product was created by the Capacity Building Center for States under Contract No. HHSP2332015000711, funded by the Children's Bureau, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Suggested Citation: Capacity Building Center for States. (2023). *Promoting Safe and Stable Families Program*. Children's Bureau, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.