



## 2022 County Government PRIORITIES

# Appropriate Funding and Reform for the Children and Youth System

Counties have the critical responsibility of assuring child welfare in the commonwealth through investigating allegations of child abuse and providing other services to the children and families in their communities. To effectively address the growing number of caseloads throughout the commonwealth and staffing shortages facing many human services agencies, the county children and youth system must receive adequate funding to keep pace with demand.

Counties throughout the commonwealth provide essential human services that assist and protect some of the state's most vulnerable residents, specifically children that are enduring abusive situations, battling mental illness, developmental disabilities and addiction. To better serve these children and their families, investments must be made in county-based programs and services to address current staff shortages and caseload increases that we are struggling to find the capacity to handle effectively.

Counties continue to advocate for increased state funding to maintain the children and youth services they provide on behalf of the state, providing a voice to children suffering from abuse and neglect. However, despite the critical importance of this work, counties continue to face staffing shortages, which leads to unsustainable caseload responsibilities for their staff. If not addressed, over time this could have a devastating impact on response rates for reports of abuse or neglect to be investigated, despite best efforts of the staff. Further, when abuse has been identified

and a child has to be removed from a dangerous home, this pervasive shortfall of flexible funding results in caseworkers lacking safe and sustainable residential environments to place these children.

Exacerbated by the stress and isolation of the pandemic, counties have seen a rise in caseloads and the severity of injuries children have sustained. During periods of less frequent exposure to school and other mandated reporters, abuse and mental health issues can go unnoticed, which delays the care these children so desperately need. Combined with more complex cases of abuse that also involve mental health, substance abuse or other needs for services, the children and youth system requires better cross-system collaboration and training, as well as strengthened partnerships with law enforcement to appropriately serve the children and families within the commonwealth.

### COUNTIES SUPPORT:

- Securing adequate funding from the state to enable hiring necessary caseworkers to address increasing caseloads.
- Reducing or removing regulatory barriers that would ease burdens on county children and youth staff, increase training and collaboration with law enforcement and work to eliminate cross-systems barriers.
- Taking steps to encourage the state to play a more active role supporting counties by implementing a statewide program and resources to assist counties in addressing the most complex cases that require specialized programs and treatment options.