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*"A lot of people are working hard to protect our children. The focus of this conference is improving the use of the data and information people have. We want to help them find ways they can better work together."*

- Institute Director  
David Yepsen

# Protecting Our Children: Using Data as the Foundation

Working group recommendations from a symposium held June 17, 2014.

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The Paul Simon Public Policy Institute, SIU School of Medicine and the Center for Rural Health and Social Service Development held the Child Welfare Symposium on June 17, 2014, in Carbondale, Illinois.

The purpose was to facilitate open discussion of how Illinois can improve services to our children in need. Those services should - and must be - carried out through a variety of methods, from access to health care to quality education and a positive environment promoting the ability to succeed.

The data presented by several leading experts indicated that Southern Illinois has seen a significant increase in child welfare services utilized. Illinois ranks third in the nation with children's longest stays in foster care, averaging 28.6 months. The information shared at the symposium examined the geographic areas currently demonstrating a greater need for services against where service providers are located and available.

One particular finding highlights the racial disparities in the child welfare system in Illinois, as evidenced by an African-American child being six times more likely to be taken into care than a Caucasian child. We hope all who participated, in addition to those using the shared discussion items, will become more involved in promoting access to services to those truly in need.



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## RECOMMENDATIONS

### Illinois policy makers should:

1. Establish a bipartisan, bicameral task force of the Illinois General Assembly to study successful child welfare data collection in other states, such as Texas and California.
2. Examine current data sharing, including the barriers to sharing data across human services agencies such as the Department of Children and Family Services, Department of Human Services and its divisions, Alcoholism and Substance Abuse and Office of Mental Health, Department of Juvenile Justice, Department of Public Health and community providers.
3. Establish a data governance board by legislation to oversee data sharing and/or create a clearinghouse for Illinois' child welfare data where data sharing does not exist between agencies and providers.
4. Create a system to collect and measure data using the federal standard as a minimum for language and data elements.
5. Collect data on racial disparity that incorporates data elements necessary for a rigorous study of racial overrepresentations and underrepresentations.
6. Support data-driven prevention strategies and establish a prescribed data collection requirement for future program funding.
7. Convene a group of stakeholders to examine and make recommendations about evidence-based programs that demonstrated good outcomes for children and families.
8. Examine the cost and availability of similar services in different regions of the state to ensure all children have access to required services.
9. Analyze state funding factors and formulas to determine disparate impacts on rural and underserved areas of Illinois when deciding resource allocation to service agencies.
10. Analyze state funding factors and formulas to ensure the appropriate allocation of resources in rural and underserved areas of Illinois.
11. Explore the consistency of the prosecution, conviction and sentencing of child abuse offenders, including juvenile sex offenders.
12. Train the child welfare workforce about:
  - The importance of data collection on race, ethnicity and immigration status.
  - Cultural equality.
  - Cultural competence.
  - Improving accessibility and utilization of services.