

Report Urges Foster Care Support

Most states do not provide the recommended reimbursements.

By Lyn Stoesen, *News Staff*



Diane DePanfilis (left) and Julie Farber at Hill briefing.

A recently released report has revealed widespread deficiencies in reimbursement rates for children in foster care as well as major disparities among states and proposes a new standard rate for each state to use.

Foster care reimbursement payments cover the basic needs of children in foster care, including food, shelter, clothing and school supplies.

The report was developed by the University of Maryland School of Social Work, Children's Rights and the National Foster Parent Association. It was released at a congressional briefing held in October. Social worker Julie Farber, director of policy at Children's Rights, and Diane DePanfilis of the University of Maryland School of Social Work were among speakers

at the event.

According to the report's executive summary, it is "the first-ever calculation of the real expenses of caring for a child in foster care in the United States. It systematically demonstrates that rates of support for children in foster care are far below what is needed to provide basic care for these children in nearly every state in the nation.

"On average, across the U.S., current foster care rates must be raised by 36 percent in order to reach the Foster Care Minimum Adequate Rates for Children (the 'Foster Care MARC') calculated through this project," the summary continues.

The report notes that the range in the difference of foster care rates is far too wide to be explained by differences in the cost of living in various parts of the country. Further, the report notes, "a number of states report using no particular methodology to determine their rates. Low among myriad state and local budget priorities, foster care rates in many states do not appear to be based on a real assessment of children's basic needs."

The report includes tables that detail the current foster care rates, the minimum adequate rate and the percentage that rates must be increased for each state. The rates are divided into averages for 2-year-olds, 9-year-olds and 16-year-olds.

"By establishing foster care rates that cover actual costs, children can receive necessary care and have happier and more normal childhoods, child welfare systems may be better able to maintain a stable pool of foster parents and children can have better chances of growing up in permanent families," the report concludes.

For the report: www.childrensrights.org/pdfs/MARC/MARCSummaryReport.pdf