

**NEWS from the North Dakota Department of Human Services
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Human Services hosts informational meeting Nov. 15 in Bismarck on new federal law aimed at strengthening families

BISMARCK, N.D. – The North Dakota Department of Human Services and Casey Family Programs are hosting an informational meeting on Thursday, Nov. 15 in Bismarck on the Family First Prevention Services Act of 2018. The new federal law prioritizes keeping families together and providing evidence-based prevention and early intervention services and programs to prevent families from entering the child welfare system.

The meeting will be held from 10 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Central Time in the Brynhild Haugland Room at the state Capitol. Families, services providers, legal and judiciary professionals, public agencies and other stakeholders engaged in child welfare services are encouraged to attend. Seating is limited to 125 attendees. Registration is not required, and there is no cost to attend. The meeting will also be webcast live at www.nd.gov/dhs/services/childfamily/.

In the morning, presenters will provide an overview of the federal law and share state-specific foster care data. At 1 p.m. attendees will learn about North Dakota's implementation efforts including a review of timelines and preliminary plans to revise funding for foster care diversion; recruitment and retention of high-quality foster families; an evidence-based kinship navigator program and other topics. At 2:15 p.m. there will be a panel discussion involving child welfare experts from Casey Family Programs, the Children's Bureau and the Department of Human Services.

"This federal legislation is the most significant change to child welfare services in decades, and it will require a whole-state approach, both public and private entities, working together to best serve children and families," said Chris Jones, executive director of the Department of Human Services. "This is the first step towards collaboration, open dialogue and a shared foundation of understanding about what North Dakota already has in place, what our state will need, and how to achieve overall systems change."

Under the new law, states and tribes will be able to access additional federal funding to support front-end prevention services. Other provisions include incentives for states to reduce placements of children in group care, expand supports for youth transitioning to adulthood, promote kinship and relative placements, as well as other enhancements to strengthen the child welfare system.

Jones said it's important that everyone understands how the legislation can complement the work that is being done to redesign the delivery of social services, maintain children in the least restrictive, most familiar environments; and shift funding upstream to support prevention efforts, while improving overall child and family outcomes.

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Anyone with questions about the new law and its impact on North Dakota can submit them to dhscfs@nd.gov in advance of the meeting. Questions will be answered during the panel discussion.

Individuals with disabilities who need accommodations to participate can contact Kathy Kalvoda in the department's Children and Family Services Division at 701-328-2316, toll-free 800-245-3736, ND Relay TTY 800-366-6888 or kkalvoda@nd.gov.