



**Main Office:** 222 East Central Parkway • Cincinnati, Ohio 45202-1225

**General Information:** (513) 946-1000

**General Information TDD:** (513) 946-1295

**FAX:** (513) 946-2400

[www.hcifs.org](http://www.hcifs.org)

[www.hcadopt.org](http://www.hcadopt.org)

[www.hcfoster.org](http://www.hcfoster.org)

**Media Contact:**

Brian Gregg

Chief Communications Officer

E-mail: [greggb@jfs.hamilton-co.org](mailto:greggb@jfs.hamilton-co.org)

Phone: 513-946-1728

Fax: 513-946-2400

**Hamilton County and Others Working for Flexibility in Child Welfare**

**Cincinnati (May 28, 2010)** Heading into Memorial Day Weekend, a group of 18 Ohio counties is working on a labor of love to protect the state's children and families.

The ProtectOhio consortium today asked the federal government to extend a waiver program that allows child protective service agencies in those 18 counties the financial flexibility to better serve youngsters and strengthen families.

The consortium was joined in the effort by the Ohio Department of Job & Family Services and the Public Children Services Association of Ohio.

"Fewer children enter the child welfare system, spend less time away from home and are safely reunited quicker with their own families or relatives thanks to ProtectOhio," said Crystal Ward Allen, executive director of PCSAO.

"In ProtectOhio counties, children taken from their homes are also more likely to be placed with relatives, rather than foster families. Those ultimately adopted have a shorter wait for a permanent home," she said.

These positive outcomes are just part of the remarkable accomplishments during the last 12 years of ProtectOhio, the Title IV-E waiver demonstration project that has changed the nature of child welfare work in participating counties.

The current waiver, which expires July 31, covers one-third of the youth involved in child welfare cases.

"Traditional child welfare funding in the United States offers old-fashioned funding formulas tied directly to removing children from their homes and families," Allen said.

"Experts recognize taking children away from even dysfunctional homes is a traumatic experience for the youth," she said.

ProtectOhio's flexible funding has allowed local child protective service agencies to invest in a wide array of services to keep children safe by helping and strengthening families in need, according to Allen.

"It has allowed each county to customize efforts for the individual family, rather than the one-size-fits-all approach found in the traditional funding that often limits an agency's ability to produce

successful outcomes,” said Randy Parker, director of Richland County Children Services in Mansfield, co-chair of the consortium.

The waiver has allowed ProtectOhio participants to better meet guidelines and requirements found in the federal government’s Child and Family Services Reviews. -

“Our goal is to keep children safe at home where possible. When not possible, we want to find the least restrictive environment possible, especially with other relatives. When a child has to be placed into foster care, work should be done to return him to his own home or establish a permanent adoptive home as quickly as possible,” said Rich Bowlen, director of Fairfield County Children Services and consortium co-chair.

An evaluation report on ProtectOhio, prepared by the Human Services Research Institute in Oregon, accompanied the package sent today citing the program’s accomplishments and challenges, including a solid fiscal success story.

ProtectOhio counties have fewer paid foster care placement days and at a lower average daily cost. Since 2002, for example, demonstration counties have reduced the number of days of paid care by almost 40 percent.

The ProtectOhio demonstration and evaluation also shows safety is not compromised when counties are allowed to invest federal funds in a full continuum of prevention and diversion services, along with placement and adoption services. Children in ProtectOhio counties had 10 percent shorter case episodes and were less likely to have their case re-opened within one year of it being closed, according to the evaluation.

“The flexible funding found in ProtectOhio has allowed a sea change in the way child welfare is practiced. It could not have arrived at a more opportune time,” Parker said.

As the economy worsened, traditional funded counties have often been forced to reduce in-home services to families. ProtectOhio counties have increased their efforts in areas such as school-based social workers, family team meetings, mental health assistance, drug/alcohol screening and assistance, court-liaison teams and kinship navigator programs.

Ohio is one of only five states in the nation currently taking advantage of the Title IV-E waiver demonstration project. All have differing success stories.

“As Congress and other national leaders consider comprehensive child welfare finance reform, these five states offer a wonderful ongoing “Petri dish” of new thinking and ideas that could continue to “test market” new techniques and strategies before they are rolled out on a national basis,” said Eric Fenner, director of Franklin County Children Services, one of the counties involved in the consortium.

Hamilton County is another site that has benefited dramatically through its participation in ProtectOhio, according to director Moira Weir.

“It has provided us with the flexibility to create innovative community-based projects that are aimed at either preventing children from entering the child welfare system or shortening their stays in the system,” Weir said.

“At a time when the taxpayers demand innovation and efficiency, ProtectOhio provides a clear path to doing just that,” she said.

The HSRI report said, “Some of the current waiver strategies have shown good effects; it is important to allow the most promising of these to further mature and reveal the full impact on child-serving systems and on child-level outcomes.”

“Should Ohio lose the waiver, the preventive child welfare services that enable children to safely remain in their homes could not be maintained, as this continuum of services requires a full federal/state/local fiscal partnership,” Fenner said. In addition, demonstration counties would be required to absorb the costs of retraining staff and retooling child welfare financial management practices in order to accommodate (traditional) reimbursement requirements.

“Now is not the time to revert back to the “old school” days of child welfare funding,” Fenner said. “Current economic conditions require government agencies, including child protective agencies, to find new and innovative ways to work effectively and efficiently.

“The ProtectOhio waiver counties have a proven track record of success and are ready and willing to continue looking for additional techniques and strategies that will keep children safe at a cost the American taxpayer can afford to pay,” Fenner said.

### **About Hamilton County’s Department of Job and Family Services**

The Department of Job and Family Services administers federal, state and local programs for those in need. The Department helps with local child protection, elderly protection, child care, child support enforcement, workforce development, cash assistance, food stamp disbursement and Medicaid disbursement. Servicing Hamilton County since 1947, the Department helps hundreds of thousands each year and is accredited by the Council on Accreditation, an international, independent, not-for-profit child and family service accrediting organization.