PREVENTION EFFORTS WILL PROTECT CHILDREN 
AND SLOW DOWN THE GROWING NEED FOR FOSTER CARE

Since 2009, the economic crash has squeezed families with extreme stress and state budget cuts have left families with very few places to turn for help. The result has been skyrocketing growth in the number of children suffering from neglect and the number living in foster care. The growth in foster care is traumatic for children, expensive for taxpayers, and overwhelming for the state Child Protective Services (CPS) system. Targeted prevention efforts can slow down the growth and preserve families.

Prevention efforts DO work to protect children in Arizona and across the country. A fiscal year 2007 evaluation report of Arizona prevention and family support services for 15,000 children showed that:

- 99.7% of high risk families did not have subsequent reports of abuse and neglect within six months
- 87% of families reported improved competence in parenting
- 82% of families showed improvement in one of their existing problems
- 74% of families completed all services

(Arizona Promoting Safe and Stable Families Evaluation Report, DES, April 2008)

Beginning in 2009, prevention efforts to assist families have been shrinking. State budget cuts reduced prevention, intervention and family support programs; diminished substance abuse treatment services; froze participation in child care assistance for working families; nearly erased behavioral health services for children and adults who don’t qualify for Medicaid; and slashed TANF cash assistance for the poorest mothers and children.

State funding to help children in their own homes has been cut in half. The Department of Economic Security contracts with community-based agencies to provide a variety of in-home services to children to strengthen families and protect safety without moving children into foster care. State funding for these contracts was cut from $43 million in fiscal year 2008 to under $22 million in fiscal year 2012.

The loss of family support has contributed to dramatic growth in reports of children being neglected. A child suffers from neglect when his or her caregivers can’t provide basic food, shelter, clothing and supervision. Extreme financial distress is often a factor in neglect, but many families can become safe and healthy for children with temporary social services. From March 2009 to September 2012, the number of reports of neglect rose 49% while the number of reports of abuse dropped slightly. Between April and September 2012, more than 2/3 of reports to the CPS hotline were for neglect (68%).

(continued)
Targeted actions by the state legislature, Child Protective Services, and community-based agencies can connect more families with prevention efforts, and slow down and reverse the growth in foster care.

**Recommended 2013 Legislative Action**

- As Governor Brewer included in her budget, appropriate $9.6 million to DES for child care subsidies to meet growth in the Child Protective Services caseload and avoid kicking children in working families out of assistance.
- Also included in Governor Brewer’s budget, appropriate $10.4 million to DES for services for families with children in foster care, including Parent Aide, reunification, and substance abuse treatment.
- In addition to the funding noted above, appropriate $10 million to DES for Family Support Services to expand community-based services that strengthen families and keep children safely in their homes after a report of abuse or neglect.
- Enact legislation that directs DES to develop an alternative response plan to provide help from community-based agencies to families with low risk reports of abuse and neglect.  HB 2144 addresses an alternative response plan.
- Convene a community coalition to develop a statewide plan to prevent child abuse and neglect.

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**Cutting Prevention Services Has Consequences**
**Contrasting Trends for AZ Children March 2009 Compared to September 2012**

- Children with working parents getting child care subsidies: -69%
- Children getting TANF Cash Assistance: -54%
- Reports of abuse and neglect: 44%
- Children receiving services in home: 37%
- Children in foster care: 6%