

# The Mockingbird Society

## 2010 ADVOCACY AGENDA

### **Retain Quality Programs for Children and Youth in Foster Care**

The state of Washington is facing a 2.6 billion dollar deficit and the challenge is to balance the budget without harming the children, youth and families in the child welfare system:

### **Safe Housing and Support**

#### **Under 18:**

**Retain the HOPE beds:** 30 day emergency shelter for teenagers who are on the streets or on a runaway status. HOPE beds are the only beds in the State of Washington that adolescents can self-refer to. HOPE beds provide safe emergency care and reduce the length of time adolescents are on runaway status. The HOPE beds are targeted to both adolescents who are legal dependents of Washington State as well as those who are from private families.

**Retain Responsible Living Skills Programs (RLSP):** RLSP beds are long term programs targeting older youth in the foster care system who have experienced multiple placements and educational changes. Typically family reunification is not considered probable and the RLSP are designed to support the "readiness" of older youth to exit the foster care system.

#### **Over 18:**

**Retain the Foster Care to 21 and Independent Youth Housing Program:** Washington State has been a leader in developing safe housing for youth being discharged from the foster care system. The federal Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act provides a 50% match to those states that offer safe housing to youth exiting foster care.

### **Adequate Legal Representation in Dependency Process:**

Current law allows youth 12 and older to request an attorney to represent them in Dependency hearings. The judge makes the final determination based on several factors including the availability of resources and attorneys. The 2010 legislative request is to remove the burden on youth to request counsel and instead require DSHS and the GAL/CASA to notify youth age 12 and older of their right to request an attorney.

### **Adding Youth or Alumni of Foster Care To The HB 2106 Transformation Design Committee (TDC):**

HB 2106 calls for major child welfare system reform and the TDC is charged with developing the plan for this system-wide reform. Currently an alumni of care sits on the TDC but legislation is required to formalize this position on the TDC and to give full voting rights to the Youth/Alumni representative. The Mockingbird Society will continue to follow closely any proposed legislation regarding HB 2106.

### **Subsidized Guardianships:**

The federal Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act contains a section that allows states to provide increased support to kinship families with the intent of reducing the number of children who enter and remain in foster care.

**Expanding Sealing Juvenile Records:**

Ensures that young people who have committed a crime but fulfilled all of the court requirements, including no further infractions with the law, are able to have their record sealed. This will allow the youth to engage in gainful employment, secure college scholarships and continue to create a positive future by having their juvenile record sealed.

**8 Hour Notification:**

Currently staff who work at emergency shelters for youth must report the youth within 8 hours to DSHS, family or law enforcement. Shelter providers believe this law pushes youth deeper underground into the hands of predators. The request is to expand this to 72 hours which would allow time for staff to develop a relationship with the youth and engage them in services including reunification to family when appropriate.

**Join Us for Youth Advocacy Day!**

Friday, February 19th, 2010

9:30 AM - 3:00 PM

Capitol Campus  
Tivoli Fountain/North Diagonal Area  
Olympia, WA

Food Provided

For more information or to RSVP or volunteer, contact Jim Theofelis or Kara Sanders at 206-323-5437.