



Candidacy Frequently Asked Questions

December 2020

What is Candidacy and how does it relate to the Family First Prevention and Services Act?

- Under the Family First Act, candidacy is defined as a “child who is identified in a prevention plan as being at **imminent risk** of entering foster care but who can remain safely at home”. The Children’s Bureau has indicated that they do not intend to further define candidacy.
- Because of this, further interpretation is needed at the state level to define core aspects of candidacy, including:
 - what it means to be at ‘imminent risk’ of entering foster care;
 - how a child gets ‘identified in a prevention plan’, and;
 - what it means to ‘remain safely at home’.
- This creates space for new opportunities and attention. Under the Family First Act, states will be able to claim reimbursement for approved activities when **servicing children who are defined as candidates in their homes**, aligning with the Department’s strategic vision.

What has been Wisconsin’s approach to Candidacy under FFPSA?

Wisconsin has chosen to define its candidacy within the state’s existing child welfare population to better support in-home planning, as well as children and families following their reunification. Instead of shifting the population served (by broadening or narrowing the front door of the Wisconsin system), Wisconsin’s proposed candidacy definition focuses on moving *where* children who entered the child welfare system are served.

Our state’s candidacy definition is centered on serving more children and families while the children remain in-home, as opposed to placing children outside of the family home. In focusing on this shift, Wisconsin will be best able to support child welfare practice changes and marshal resources, including financial resources, to encourage and incentivize, local jurisdictions in meeting the challenge of Wisconsin’s strategic vision: to Strengthen Wisconsin’s Families to Support Their Children.

What is Wisconsin’s working definition of candidacy?

Children identified as candidates for foster care (children who are at imminent risk of entering foster care) are children who meet one or more of the following criteria:

- Children who are being served by the local child welfare agency where it has been determined that there are existing danger threats that can be mitigated by the provision of services aimed at keeping children safe in-home and ameliorating the conditions that render children to be unsafe.
- Children who have been returned to their parent's care, and services remain necessary to prevent re-entry.
- Youth engaged in the youth justice system with identified risk factors that are determined as part of the standardized assessment process.
- Youth engaged in the youth justice system who are returning to their parent's care post-removal, and services remain necessary to prevent re-entry.

What impact does this candidacy definition have on direct practice with families?

Because Wisconsin has chosen to define candidacy within the existing child welfare population, child welfare agencies will continue to serve the same children and families. That being said, Wisconsin's strategic shift, is to change where our state serves children and families, from out-of-home, to in-home. The needs of children and families remain complex and serving these same families in-home will require continued innovation and resource investment at the state and local level.

I am a youth justice worker, how is FFPSA and candidacy related to my work?

Wisconsin has opted to include youth who are at risk of being removed from their family homes within the proposed candidacy definition. While the child protective services and youth justice systems are in some ways distinct, data shows families and youth often experience overlap between the two systems and may view them interchangeably. Of Wisconsin youth referred to Youth Justice services in 2019:

- about 2/3 had at least one previous Child Protective Services Report screened-in
- about 1/6 had experienced at least one out-of-home care placement episode

Therefore, Wisconsin has identified it to be of importance to consider children and adolescents served by the youth justice system when defining candidacy, as well as those served within the child protective services system. It is important to note that Wisconsin is uniquely poised to serve this population, as Wisconsin's Division of Safety and Permanence oversees both the child protection and youth justice systems.

What are the next steps regarding Wisconsin's Candidacy Definition?

Ongoing work continues related to operationalizing data collection related to the child welfare candidacy population and youth justice candidacy populations. Wisconsin continues to develop a State 5-Year-Prevention Plan as required under FFPSA.