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As pandemic stresses the foster care system, Gen Justice offers measures state lawmakers can implement now to retain foster families, improve oversight and court participation, reduce time in care and more

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PHOENIX, Arizona – Today Gen Justice released [33 Reforms to Help Kids in Foster Care During the Pandemic and After](#), a shareable blueprint of ideas to help lawmakers address the pandemic's impact on children in foster care. Reports show that severe abuse has been rising, courts are backed up, and the number of foster families is dwindling.

"The foster care system was already struggling to keep up because of the opioid epidemic," said Darcy Olsen, Gen Justice founder. "Lawmakers must act swiftly to get ahead of the coming tsunami."

Comprehensive government data shows that increases in unemployment are associated with increases in violence against children.

This nonpartisan memo was prepared in response to the inquiries Gen Justice has received requesting foster care policy recommendations. "We talked with hundreds of parents, teens, researchers, social workers and practitioners to identify fault lines in the system and generate practical solutions," said Rebecca Masterson, Gen Justice Chief Counsel and author of the report.

"The right to an attorney is a life jacket for children in foster care," said Masterson, who cites research showing that kids represented by lawyers exit the system up to 3 times faster than children without legal representation.

Recently, federal funds were made available to state agencies for this very purpose.

Other ideas to reduce the need for foster care, reduce time in care, and otherwise improve outcomes for children in care include:

- Require the state to find relatives immediately, keeping kids with their kin and reserving foster families for kids in greatest need
- Require courts to meet deadlines by banning the continuances that plague child welfare courts
- Bring back experienced foster families by grandfathering in those who are willing to reopen their homes to kids in need
- Retain more foster families by allowing reciprocal licensing with other states
- The federal Work Opportunity Tax Credit provides a credit for employers who hire individuals who traditionally face employment barriers including Veterans and the previously incarcerated. States can extend this opportunity to local businesses who help train and hire kids aging out of foster care.

About Gen Justice

Gen Justice is an award-winning charitable organization celebrating its third year working to mend the broken child protection system through nonpartisan policy changes and a pro bono Children's Law Clinic. Online: www.genjustice.org

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