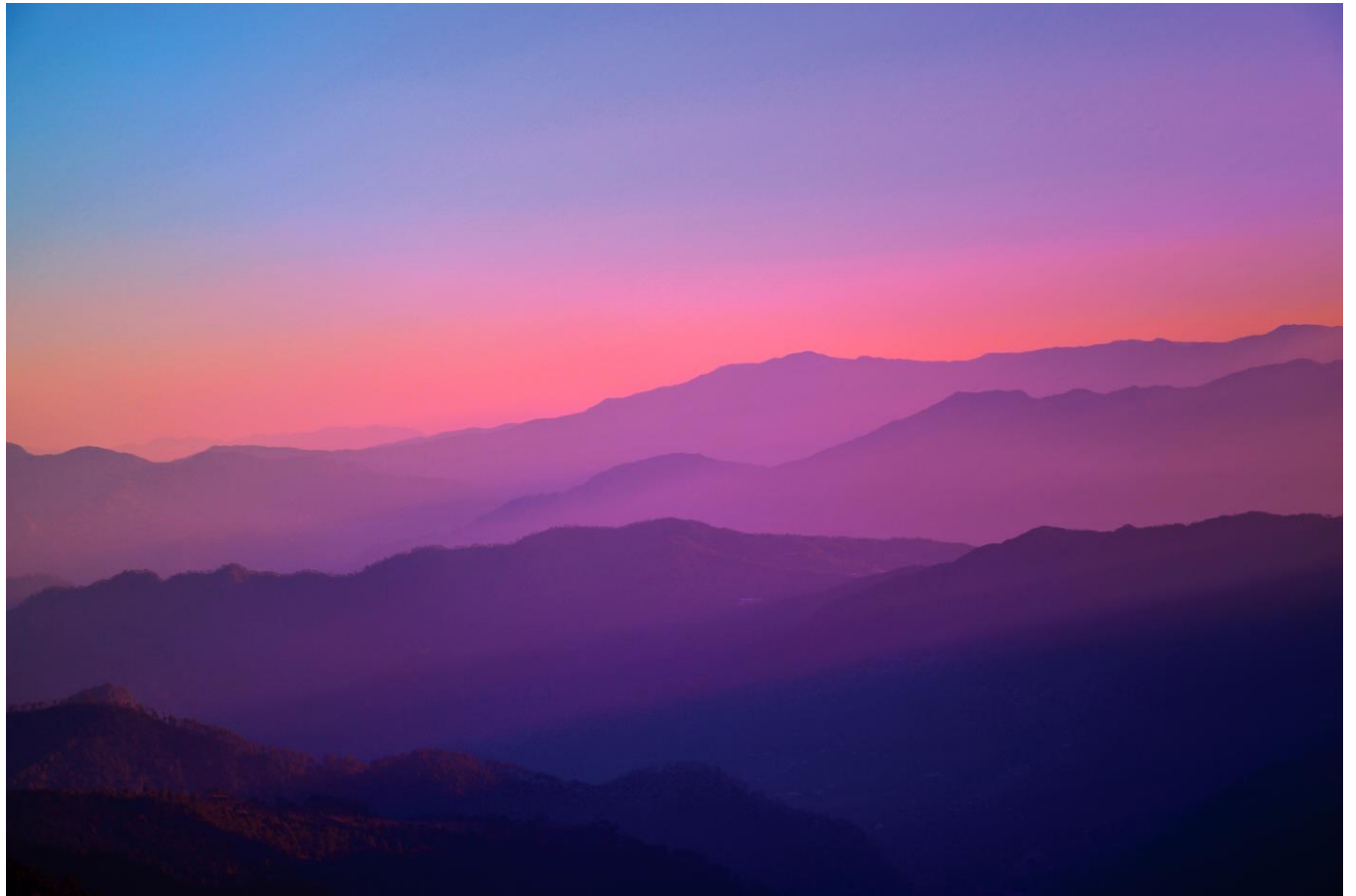




The Role of Relationships and Accountability in Advancing Prevention Efforts

- Arizona S. 1307 (2022)
 - Mandates use of an “evidence-informed safety assessment model to assess the safety of a child.”
 - Requires department to present the proposed safety assessment model to the Joint Legislative Oversight Committee on the Department of Child Safety before implementation.
- Illinois S. 3889 (2022)
 - Mandates coordination of services “across child-serving State agencies”
 - Focus is on strategies and services for “children from birth to age 25 and their families with the goal of addressing children’s mental health needs” to include prevention efforts.

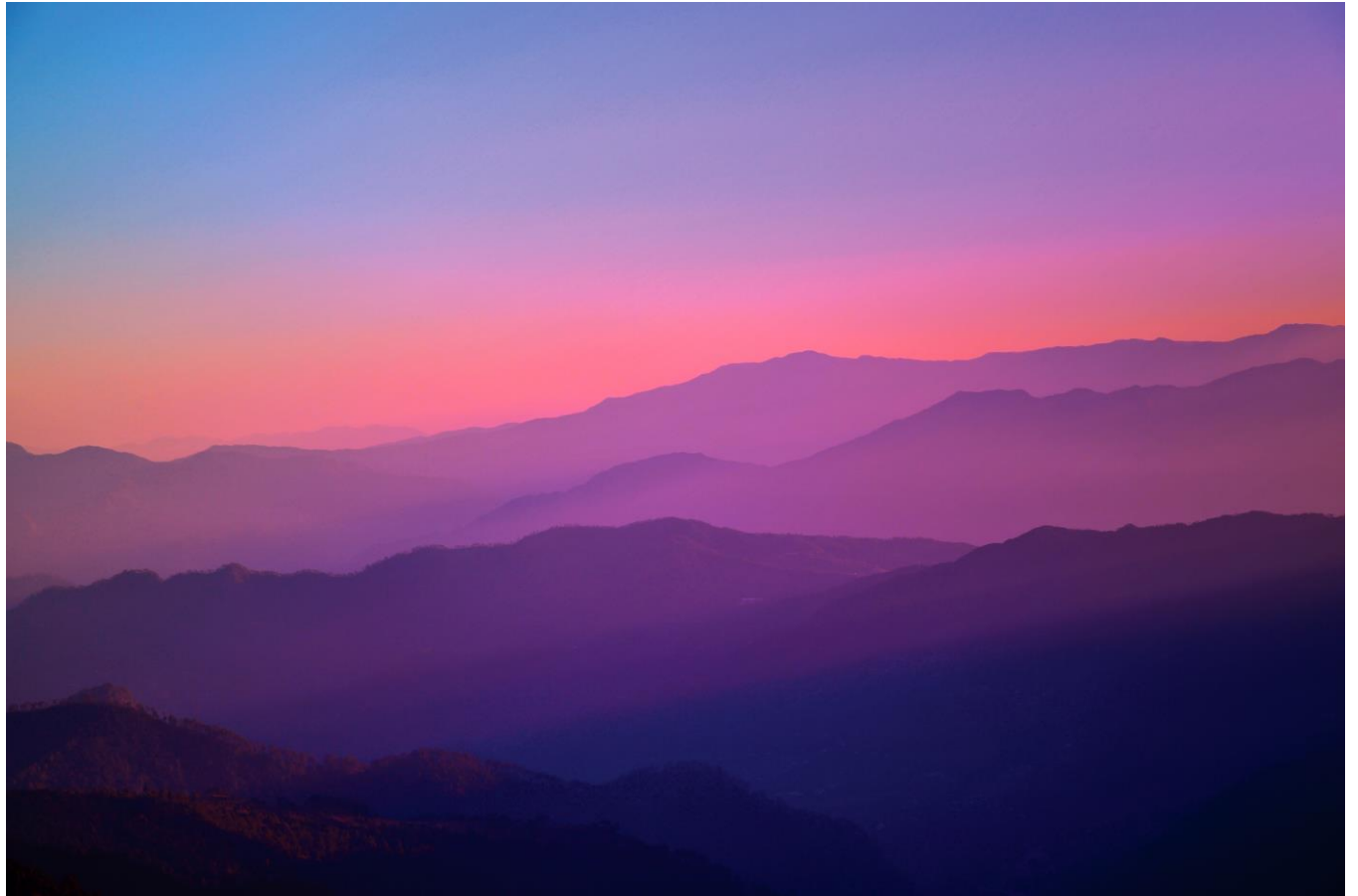


Recent State Action

Several states passed legislation in 2022 regarding accountability in child welfare systems or cross-sectoral partnerships regarding prevention.

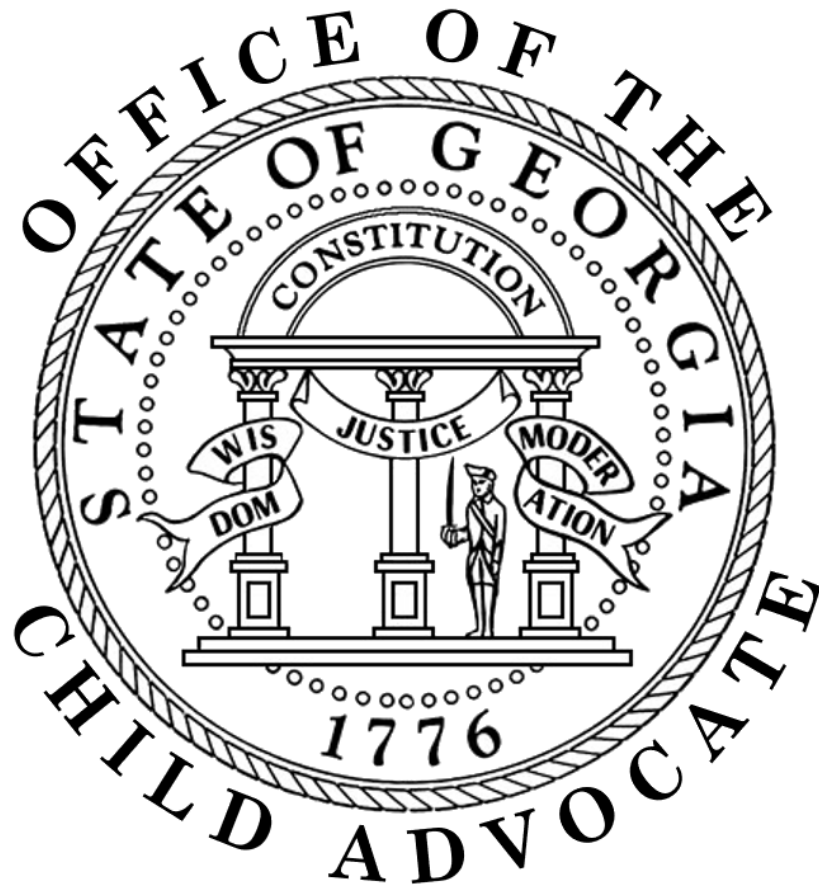
- Colorado H. 1295 (2022)
 - Broad bill that goes beyond a focus on child maltreatment prevention.
 - Mandates that local coordinating organizations develop community plans that address integration of services and programs to support families and implementation of Family First.

- Georgia H. 424 (2021)
 - Adds a section of tax code that incentivizes contributions benefiting aging-out programs
 - Provides for accountability measures by allowing for audit requests concerning the code “as a whole or of any one or more qualified organizations” by certain legislative committees.



Recent State Action

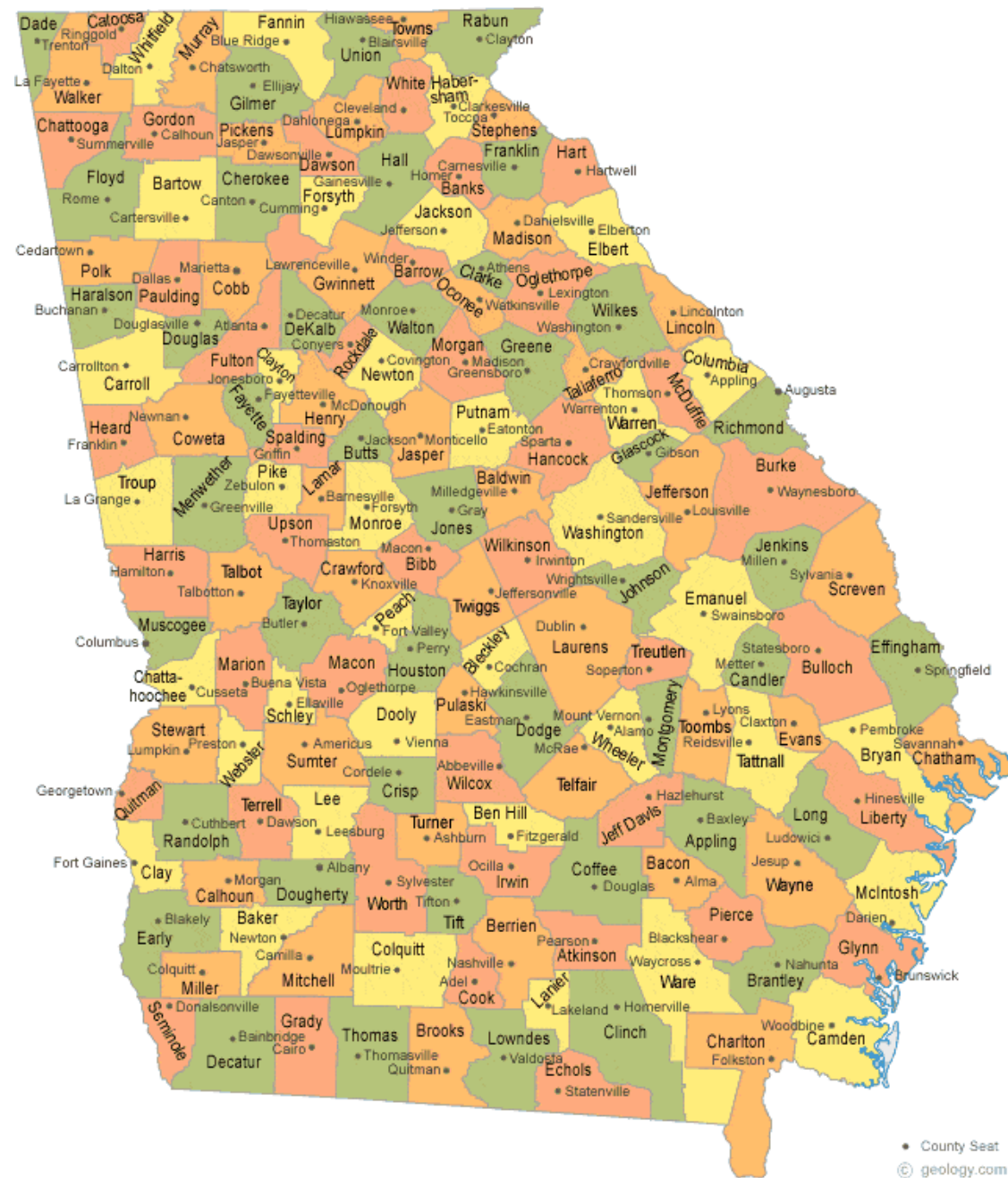
Several states passed legislation in 2021 and 2022 regarding accountability in child welfare systems or cross-sectoral partnerships regarding prevention.



Governance &
Oversight

National Conference
of State Legislatures

SEPTEMBER 13, 2022



“The Office of the Child Advocate for the Protection of Children will provide children with an avenue through which to seek relief when their rights are violated by state officials and agents entrusted with their protection and care.” (O.C.G.A. § 15-11-740 (b))

The Office of the Child Advocate oversees Georgia's child welfare system by providing case evaluation and assistance, policy and practice consulting, education, and advocacy.

The main duty of the Child Advocate is to “identify, receive, investigate, and seek the resolution or referral of complaints made by or on behalf of children concerning any act, omission to act, practice, policy, or procedure of an agency or any contractor or agent thereof that may adversely affect the health, safety, or welfare of the children”.

(O.C.G.A. § 15-11-143 (1))

Complaints & Concerns:

Public Complaints

Judges, Legislators, & Agency Officials

Governor's Office (“Governor’s Letters”)

Additional Duties:

Training-

- Guardians ad Litem
- Juvenile Court Intake Officers
- Child Abuse Protocol Committee

Host clearinghouse for Child Abuse Protocols

Serve on the Child Fatality Review Panel

Facilitate third-level foster parent grievance mediation

Strategic Priorities

Help ensure system accountability for agencies that provide services or oversight of children involved with Georgia's child welfare system

Advance system improvements to Georgia's Child Welfare System

Cultivate a well-trained, experienced, and diverse team empowered to achieve the mission and goals of OCA, better serve children and families, and invest in Georgia's workforce



2020-2029

A Vision for Child & Family Well-being in Georgia

Our State's Child Abuse & Neglect Prevention Plan

Objective: Increase family economic stability

- Expand efforts to develop safe and decent affordable housing for families
- Adopt/promote evidence-based family-friendly business policies (e.g., family leave, release time to attend parent-teacher conferences, on-site childcare)
- Expand programs and practices aimed at parents who are "returning citizens" (i.e., formerly incarcerated adults)
- Expand access to affordable childcare for parents who are working or in school (e.g., tax breaks for companies that offer on-site or subsidized childcare), especially for lower-income and hourly-wage-earning families
- Expand nontraditional programs and approaches to earn high-school diplomas (e.g., technical colleges)
- Expand opportunities for youth to explore career options before high-school graduation
- Expand small-business development and support programs
- Increase access to secondary (e.g., GED and high-school diplomas) and post-secondary degrees and certificate programs
- Increase adult literacy through the adoption and promotion of evidence-based practices and models
- Increase life-skills training for school-aged children and youth (e.g., financial literacy as a core competency)
- Identify and promote efforts to increase wages so that full-time employment does not result in households living at or below the federal poverty level
- Promote poverty-informed training for local and state policymakers
- Promote the development of positive and safe workplaces

EFFORTS

Expand family-strengthening preventive services and community supports

- **Increase community capacity**, to proactively and equitably meet child, youth, and family needs before maltreatment occurs.
- **Expand & align Georgia's continuum of EBPs & broaden access to intensive interventions**, so that children and families are served through effective interventions in their homes and communities.
- **Expand and align community-based post-permanency supports**, to promote family, youth, and child well-being and lasting permanency.

Build a placement continuum that prioritizes family, healing & permanency

- **Engage and support parents of children and youth in care**, to facilitate behavior change, maintain family bonds and prepare families for permanency
- **Identify and proactively support kin and caregivers** to provide safe, stable, family- like placements and appropriate care.
- **Select and implement evidence-based model of TFC**, to provide a structured and therapeutic family environment for children and youth with specialized needs.
- **Strengthen and promote targeted use of congregate care** to better meet the emotional and behavioral needs of children and youth—who are placed in congregate care less often, for shorter periods.

RESULTS

Communities are **healthy**, supportive, and full of opportunity.

Families are well and **children and youth are safe.**

Unnecessary child welfare involvement and foster care entry are prevented.

Reduced maltreatment and repeat maltreatment.

Reliance on **congregate care is safely reduced**, as children in foster care increasingly reside in appropriate family-based and kinship settings.

Children's **clinical and socio-emotional needs are appropriately met** within their placement settings across all placement types.

Family and community connections are strong and supported during and following foster care—to promote well-being and establish the foundation for permanency.

IMPACT

Children, youth, and families experience **greater well-being and healing** throughout the child welfare continuum.

Deeper and more intrusive system involvement is prevented.

Children and youth spend **less time in foster care and more time with family.**

Communities and families are **strengthened and empowered** and share power in planning and decision-making.

Families have increased **resiliency, self-sufficiency, stability, and lasting connections.**

Our work promotes just and equitable outcomes.



2022 Legislative Session:

Senate became concerned over reports of significant backlogs of cases. The Legislature encouraged the creation of a multi-disciplinary workgroup to look into the backlog and work toward long-term solutions.

Members appointed from:

*Georgia Department of Human Services/Division of Family and Children Services

*Georgia Council of Juvenile Court Judges

*Georgia Office of the Child Advocate

*Georgia CASA

*CIP Program (Georgia Supreme Court Committee on Justice for Children)

Larger group with stakeholders from a wider array: judges, parent attorneys, child attorneys, child welfare agency attorneys, attorney GALs, foster parents.

Workgroup Challenges:

- Need to define “backlog”
- Need for centralized court data (none in GA yet)
- Need for data-sharing among state agencies that serve children and families
- Need for judicial buy-in
- No authority outside of the authority of the participating agencies
- Avoiding unnecessary legislative fixes

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Encourage opportunities to build relationships, this builds trust, transparency, etc.
- *Stay informed/abreast of trending issues
- ----get to know community organizations (attend a CASA training, observe in juvenile court)
- ----policy organization hosting listening session/policy forum in off-season, use of blue-ribbon panels to discuss issues
- *encourage study committees/fiscal notes and fully understand issue

Jerry Bruce
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Office of the Child Advocate
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How does accountability look in your state and how is it going?

What policy levers exist in your state to coordinate prevention activities across multiple partners?



Think, Pair, Share



COLORADO

Department of Human Services

Think, Pair, Share



From the Georgia and Colorado examples, what is one idea or lesson you can apply or explore in your state?

Share a success or challenge from your state related to cross-sectoral partnerships for child maltreatment prevention.

