

October 1, 2024

Dear Mandatory Reporting Task Force Committee,

The Reimagining Colorado Child Welfare Steering Committee, collaborates to help to define how policy makers can re-envision and redevelop Colorado's child welfare system, aiming to make it more equitable, accountable, and less traumatic for children and families. Through authentic engagement and diverse perspectives with key stakeholders like Lived Expertise, the Colorado Department of Human Services, the Colorado Offices of Respondent Parents' Counsel and Children's Representative, The Kempe Center, Casey Family Programs, various county representatives, Foster America and other champions; the committee works to develop a blueprint for transformation, bringing together expertise and resources to create family-centered, child-focused recommendations for policymakers and community leaders. Our goal is to have a lasting impact on current and future generations by taking ownership of change in the child welfare system.

The Reimagining Steering Committee is reaching out because we're also interested in system enhancements that help connect people before a crisis occurs. Here are a few facts and thoughts that the Reimagining Colorado Child Welfare Steering Committee would like to share with the Mandatory Reporting Task Force.

844-CO-4-KIDS is Colorado's Child Abuse and Neglect Hotline. The data from January to December 2023 revealed that the hotline received a significant total of 217,922 calls. Within these calls, less than 17% of all calls contained actual allegations of child abuse/neglect, as outlined by Colorado law.

If a significant portion of these unnecessary calls could be redirected to a different system (like a warmline), whether an existing one or a new one, seamlessly and efficiently, we could better serve individuals with non-child protection needs (crucial resources). These crucial resources may include housing assistance, financial challenges, mental, medical, and behavioral health services, childcare, employment support, legal representation, food insecurity, clothing support, health insurance needs, and transportation among others. Furthermore, these families and children are at risk of re-referral for needs that can and could be addressed in their communities by utilizing a warmline system approach. Colorado has two "warm line" examples that could be enhanced and expanded for this purpose - Mile High United Way's 211 R & R, and Larimer County's Supported Families, Stronger Community Program that handle both a call line and hands on support. Examples such as these are being explored nationally for this purpose.

A promising approach to expanding upstream prevention lies in the incorporation of warmlines or helplines. These support systems, distinct from the child welfare system, offer assistance and guidance to mandated reporters, community members, and families before issues escalate to a

critical level. By facilitating proactive access to crucial resources - warmlines nurture a culture centered on support rather than monitoring. This strategy fosters a preventive approach to addressing challenges before they evolve into instances of maltreatment.

The “option” of being transferred to a "warmline" could save families and children from unnecessary child welfare involvement while simultaneously meeting that family’s needs. The Reimagining Steering Committee has set this as one of the goals for 2024 and 2025 and is planning to lead some exploration, co-design and implementation of this work and would very much appreciate thought-partnering and feedback from your work.

Thank you for taking the time to consider our thoughts. We appreciate you all and the work you have done. Please feel free to contact us if you have any questions or if you would like to schedule a chat with our chairs and team.

Sincerely,

The Reimagining Colorado Child Welfare Steering Committee

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<https://co4kids.org/reimagining/>