



### POLICY GOAL 3.3

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State law should require child welfare to provide access to specialized services for identified sex trafficked children and youth.

**WHILE A RELATIVELY SMALL PERCENTAGE OF CHILDREN REFERRED TO CHILD WELFARE ENTER** on report of suspected child sex trafficking, child welfare has an important and unavoidable role in responding to child maltreatment involving commercial sexual exploitation. The enactment of federal legislation, including the *Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act (2015)* and *Justice for Victims of Trafficking Act (2015)*, has accelerated state and county child welfare reforms to expand their traditional role of investigating and intervening in cases of intrafamilial abuse and neglect to responding in cases of child sex trafficking, including non-familial cases.<sup>1</sup> A change in federal legislation and funding streams recognized the complex needs of child survivors; while some standard child abuse and neglect policies, practices, and responses may still be utilized, it is critical that child and youth survivors have access to specialized care and services that address the unique harm experienced.

It is imperative that child welfare is prepared to complement community-based service responses to provide specialized care, services, and, when appropriate, placement to children who enter the system on a report of child sex trafficking.<sup>2</sup> Recognizing the strong correlation between child welfare involvement and exploitation that occurs while the child is in the care of or interacting with the system,<sup>3</sup> state law should also require agencies to screen for and respond to vulnerabilities to exploitation and experiences of sex trafficking victimization among youth already within the system.

Ideally, state law should require child welfare to offer an array of comprehensive services and support for identified child and youth survivors while eliminating barriers to ensure services are impactful and accessible. State law should also ensure that child welfare is positioned—through mandates and adequate funding—to facilitate access to comprehensive services for child and youth survivors.

## DRAFTING CONSIDERATIONS:

TO ACCOMPLISH THIS POLICY GOAL, STATE LAW SHOULD...

- ▶ Require child welfare to facilitate access to comprehensive services for child and youth survivors.
- ▶ Require that the provided services be specialized.
- ▶ Appropriate funding to ensure these efforts can be implemented.

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- 1 Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act, Pub. L. No. 113-183, 128 Stat. 1919 (2014); Justice for Victims of Trafficking Act (JVTA) of 2015, Pub. L. No: 114-22, 129 Stat 227 (2015).
  - 2 *Best Practices and Recommendations for States*, NATIONAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON SEX TRAFFICKING OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH IN THE UNITED STATES (2020), [https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/otip/nac\\_report\\_2020.pdf](https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/otip/nac_report_2020.pdf) (last visited Jan. 1, 2026).
  - 3 *From Abuse and Exploited to Abused and Exploited; The Intersection of the Child Welfare System with the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children*, NATIONAL CENTER FOR YOUTH LAW (2015) <https://www.thorn.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/CSEC-Child-Welfare-Report.pdf> (last visited Jan. 1, 2026).