

- Speaker 1: [00:00](#) It is my great pleasure to be with you all this afternoon and to join you all in articulating a path to ensure that we are indeed a nation of strong and thriving families. I want to thank Jerry Milner and all of the staff at the Children's Bureau for the work they are doing to transform child welfare into a system that truly supports child and family wellbeing. I especially want to recognize Elaine Stedt, Rosie Gomez and others in the Children's Bureau for their work in planning this huge national conference, bringing us together in a shared commitment to preserving families, building resilience, promoting wellbeing, strengthening community capacity and supporting our workforce.
- Speaker 1: [00:55](#) And most importantly, I want to thank each and every one of you for taking the time to be here today and to join us in a huge culture change effort. And I do hope you take this opportunity to learn from each other and take important effort back to your communities.
- Speaker 1: [01:15](#) For many, many years I have been working on integrating systems, collaborating with people and hearing from those who have been in our systems, so that we can improve. So I want to tell you a story that I heard that I thought fit so well with what we're doing today.
- Speaker 1: [01:35](#) Next fall when you see geese heading south for the winter, flying along in a V-formation, think about what science has learned about why they fly that way. As each bird flaps its wings, it creates uplift for the bird immediately following it. By flying in a V-formation the whole flock can fly at least 71 percent farther than if each bird flew on its own. Perhaps people who share a common direction can get where we want to go quicker and easier if we work together.
- Speaker 1: [02:11](#) When a goose falls out of formation, it feels the resistance of trying to go alone, and quickly it gets back into formation to take advantage of flying with the flock. If we have as much sense as a goose, we will work with others who are going the same way that we are.
- Speaker 1: [02:28](#) When the lead goose gets tired, he rotates back in the wing, that should tell us something about ego, and another goose flies on the point. It pays to take turns doing hard jobs for our group. These geese honk from behind to encourage those up front to keep up their speed.
- Speaker 1: [02:47](#) And finally, get this, when a goose weakens or is wounded and falls out of formation, two geese fall out and follow him down to help and protect him. They stay with him until he is able to fly

again. And then they catch up with the group and move forward.

- Speaker 1: [03:05](#) So again, if we have any sense of a goose we would all stand by each other that way. The author on that little story is unknown but it sure says a lot about what we could do with the child welfare system. We have today an opportunity to transform our system. We can move from a child welfare system that operates in isolation and does not produce the outcomes children and families deserves, to an integrated system of support that creates the conditions for strong and thriving families and communities where children are free from harm. I think that's all of our desire. We all know this must be done. We know it is possible and we are all here together for the next three days to build that path forward. We know that some of the work ahead will be difficult, because currently we are often disconnected from one another. We're disconnected from communities. We're disconnected across agencies at local, state and federal levels.
- Speaker 1: [04:09](#) How many of you heard this when you call another agency, "I'm sorry. I can't share that information with you. It's confidential," while you're sitting with a family that's saying, "Please don't make me tell that story one more time"? But our commitment to this work has to be fierce. The excuses "why not" have to stop. And we feel both the opportunity and the urgency to do this is right now. You're never going to see a more passionate commissioner than you have right now with Jerry Milner who's working to make this happen.
- Speaker 1: [04:41](#) I have never heard a child or family tell me that they would like us to wait for one more taskforce, one more committee, one more meeting before we figure out how to respond to their hunger, fear or abuse. We have an urgency to make changes to a very siloed system. We know the action that needs to happen, so together let's move forward, take the risk and do this for our families and our children.
- Speaker 1: [05:09](#) Last year alone child protection agencies received 4.1-million referrals involving 7.5-million children. That is more than 20,000 children every day. So in the three days that we are here at NCCAN, 60,000 of those referrals will come in. This should stop us all in our tracks and it clearly calls for a change in course. Our child protection systems are overloaded. They are responding to the needs of families with young children that we know can and should be met much earlier in our communities, and they are operating in a perpetual crisis mode.

- Speaker 1: [05:49](#) Child maltreatment is not a problem that should be or can be owned by the child protection system. We have a public health problem that requires a much more comprehensive solution. The social and economic cost of child maltreatment rival every other major public health issue. We must focus on primary prevention of maltreatment before it occurs, while we simultaneously ensure that those children who have experienced maltreatment, and their families, get the necessary support and care they need to come back together to live healthy and productive lives.
- Speaker 1: [06:25](#) Only by activating broad cross-sector coalitions, with no excuses of data sharing, far beyond the child protection agency will we improve child wellbeing and address the conditions in the places where people live, learn, work and play. We have a collective role and responsibility to reduce community risk by disrupting harmful intergenerational cycles and by promoting family stability and self-sufficiency.
- Speaker 1: [06:54](#) We need to continue to look at the whole family. We know much of what needs to be done. We need to strengthen our support of children and families. We need to strengthen the capacity of communities. We need to strengthen and support our workforce. We also need to advance broad community efforts to strengthen economic supports for families and advance our economic mobility and self-sufficiency. We need to provide quality care and education early in life. We need to promote healthy child development with a broad understanding of trauma. And we need to reduce the risk of homelessness and housing instability.
- Speaker 1: [07:30](#) We need to sometimes remember that the parents we're talking to were the children that we had in our system. These are issues that directly impact all of our agencies, offices and organizations. These are issues that directly impact the public and the private sectors. By supporting broad community efforts together we can take on endemic problems, like disproportionality, infant mortality, child fatalities.
- Speaker 1: [07:58](#) At the federal level we are redefining our role in support communities, reducing barriers to service and streamlining processes so the families can be successful. We want to advance economically and care for their children. We are incredibly excited about working with all of you to advance this throughout the country. This work requires public and private partnership, including faith-based and non-traditional partners. Governments simply cannot do this alone.

- Speaker 1: [08:27](#) But having been in the local system and working at the state system, I remember so often saying, "If those darn feds would just get out of the way we could do so much." I'm a fed that will say, "We'll get out of the way if it can help you move bigger, better, faster, more bold to help move healthy communities." And I'm a fed that'll say, "I'll come in and help you with TA and assistance." I'm a fed that says, "We want to hear you because we want you to hear the community you serve." And we are committing to you that we will walk our talk at the federal level by working integrally with our federal partners, even if they're not in our own agency. We are committed to work with HUD. We are committed to work with education. We are committed to work with all of the health agencies in HHS.
- Speaker 1: [09:15](#) That is historically new and it will be the first time, but we are already doing it and we already have examples. One of the things we've done within ACF is we, to walk our talk, we decided to take action and we decided that we will work through this with every single department in ACF to start with.
- Speaker 1: [09:37](#) So our National Human Trafficking Prevention Group has come up with an action plan. They are increasing primary prevention of child abuse and maltreatment that has ripple effects in reducing seemingly intractable problems like human trafficking. Human trafficking is a form of child abuse and states are required to respond. There's no single pathway for how children become victims of human trafficking. They may be coerced by peers, recruited by traffickers, directly in person or online. They could be abducted, or they could be sold or forced by their own family members. We know that the experience of child abuse and maltreatment may lead to being a victim for future human trafficking.
- Speaker 1: [10:21](#) Children in out-of-home care are particularly at risk of being trafficked. Several studies show that between 50% to 90% of children who were victims of child sex trafficking had been involved in the child welfare system. That is why today in the Administration for Children and Families we are rolling out an initiative to develop a robust national human trafficking prevention action plan. We are seeking partnerships with states, tribes, non-government agencies and the private sector to amplify national and local conversation on what is working to prevent human trafficking and scale out solutions.
- Speaker 1: [10:58](#) We seek to collaborate with state and county child welfare systems and researchers to reduce vulnerabilities of trafficking. We want to identify the youth in our care who are at high risk for human trafficking, so we can intervene early on. This is just

one of the examples of how we are integrating prevention across programs serving children and families. We know that innovation and flexibility are key ingredients to help us bring this vision to life, that innovation and flexibility must be matched with leadership and with the recognition that primary prevention is our only reasonable, logical and ethical way to strengthen families to care for their children in safe and healthy ways.

- Speaker 1: [11:43](#) So I thank you for being here. I encourage you to take the risks to be bold as we move forward with a new human services department, new human services system, a new human services way that will have such a big impact that we can all look back and say, "I remember when the 'what if' happened," and not, "Well, we thought we could do it but it was really hard."
- Speaker 1: [12:09](#) So some of you have heard me say this before but I want to read this poem to you that I like to close with, because you are all leaders and as leaders in this field it's hard work but I believe that our systems are moving in the direction that we need to go.
- Speaker 1: [12:26](#) So, "May you have the grace and wisdom to act kindly. May you act not from arrogance, but out of service. May those who work for you know you see and respect them. May you know the wisdom of deep listening, the encouragement of an appreciative gaze and the decorum of held dignity. May you have a mind that loves frontiers, so that you can evoke the bright fields that lie beyond the view of the regular eye. May you have good friends to mirror your blind spots. May leadership be for you a true adventure of growth."
- Speaker 1: [12:59](#) We look forward to helping you change the world. Thank you so much.