

Critical Congressional Help for Children in Foster Care is Possible in September

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The 110th Congress has taken important, bipartisan, bicameral steps toward improving the lives of children and youth who experience abuse and neglect. The Fostering Connections to Success Act (H.R. 6307), unanimously passed in the House, and the Finance Committee Chairman's Mark of a similar bill, moving towards passage in the Senate, have a number of provisions in common that will help promote safety, permanency and well-being for children and youth in foster care.

H.R. 6307 and the Chairman's Mark will:

Help more children find permanent homes with relatives

- Both establish kinship navigator programs to help link relative caregivers, inside and outside of the formal child welfare system, to services and supports to address the needs of the children in their care.
- Both require that a child's relatives be notified when the child becomes involved with the child welfare system, giving relatives an early opportunity to participate in the care of the child.
- Both allow Title IV-E funds to be used for guardianship assistance payments to support children who leave foster care for legal guardianship with a relative.
- Both allow states to use federal training funds to provide training to relative guardians.
- Both help children in relative guardianship placements to maintain family connections by encouraging that siblings be placed together.

Help other children find permanent homes with adoptive families by updating and reauthorizing the adoption incentive program and ensuring that prospective adoptive parents know about the adoption tax credit.

Help American Indian children receive services and support by allowing Indian tribes direct access to Title IV-E.

Help older youth prepare for adulthood by allowing youth to continue to receive federal foster care, adoption assistance, and relative guardianship beyond the age of 18.

Help meet children's educational needs by requiring that children receiving foster care maintenance, adoption assistance or subsidized guardianship payments be enrolled in school and that efforts be made to enhance educational stability and minimize school changes.

In addition to these common provisions, H.R. 6307 and the Chairman's Mark each have several unique provisions. These provisions would build upon the common elements to further promote safety, permanency and well-being.

H.R. 6307 will help:

Maintain sibling connections for all children in the child welfare system by requiring that siblings removed from their homes be placed together in any foster or adoptive home, as well as any subsidized guardianship home.

Maintain support for children already permanently placed with relatives by allowing states to continue to use IV-E funds to support those children who received guardianship assistance payments and services as part of a IV-E waiver.

Provide critical training to more child welfare staff by allowing states to use federal training funds to provide training to private agency staff with whom they contract and to members of the staff of abuse and neglect courts, attorneys representing the agency, parents or children and guardians ad litem or other court appointed special advocates representing the children.

Maintain family connections by authorizing a competitive grant program that could be used for intensive family-finding efforts or family group decision meetings, as well as kinship navigator programs.

Address children's health needs by requiring states to develop a plan in coordination with the state Medicaid agency for improving health care services for children in foster care.

The Chairman's Mark will:

Ensure that more children with special needs who are adopted from foster care receive federal adoption assistance by eliminating the AFDC and SSI income requirements and resource limits for such support.

Help older youth successfully transition to independence by ensuring that those who leave foster care to live with relatives at age 16 or older continue to be able to access independent living supports including Education and Training Vouchers. Additionally, youth who remain in foster care beyond age 18 would be required to develop a transition plan to ensure they have the needed skills and supports when they leave foster care.

Expand the adoption incentives program by rewarding states for increasing the rate of adoption and the number of kinship guardianships with any funds remaining after awarding incentive payments for increasing the number of adoptions.

Allow more children placed with relatives in foster care to receive federal support by authorizing up to 10 demonstration projects that would permit different building structure and grounds requirements in the licensing standards for relative and non-relative foster parents – both standards would have to ensure the safety of children and include criminal background checks.