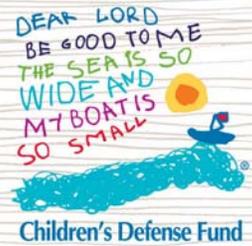


Children's Defense Fund

Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act Will Improve Outcomes for Children and Youth in Foster Care



October 14, 2008

The *Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act* (H.R. 6893/P.L. 110-351) will help hundreds of thousands of children and youth in foster care by promoting permanent families for them through relative guardianship and adoption and improving education and health care. Additionally, it will extend federal support for youth to age 21. The act will also offer for the first time many American Indian children important federal protections and support.

The *Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act* will improve outcomes for children and youth in foster care by:

PROMOTING PERMANENT FAMILIES FOR CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE

With Relatives

- **Notice to Relatives When Children Enter Care.** Increases opportunities for relatives to step in when children are removed from their parents and placed in foster care by ensuring they get notice of this removal.
- **Kinship Navigator Programs.** Guarantees funds for Kinship Navigator programs, through new Family Connection grants, to help connect children living with relatives, both in and out of foster care, with the supports and assistance they need.
- **Subsidized Guardianship Payments for Relatives.** Helps children in foster care leave care to live permanently with grandparents and other relative guardians when they cannot be returned home or adopted and offers federal support to states to assist with subsidized guardianship payments to families for these children, generally to age 18. In certain circumstances, children may continue to receive guardianship assistance to age 21. Clarifies that all children who, as of September 30, 2008, were receiving federally-supported subsidized guardianship payments or services in states with Child Welfare Demonstration Waivers will be able to continue to receive that assistance and services under the new program. Clarifies that children who leave foster care after age 16 for kinship guardianship are eligible for independent living services and makes them eligible for education and training vouchers.
- **Licensing Standards for Relatives.** Clarifies that states may waive non-safety related licensing standards for relatives on a case-by-case basis and requires the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to report to Congress on the use of licensing waivers and recommendations for increasing the percentage of relative foster family homes that are licensed.

With Adoptive Families

- **Incentives for Adoption.** Increases incentives to states to find adoptive families for children in foster care, especially those with disabilities or other special needs and older youth.
- **Adoption Assistance.** Increases opportunities for more children with special needs to receive federally-supported adoption assistance without regard to the income of the birth families from whom they were originally removed.

With Birth Families and Other Relatives

- **New Family Connection Grants.** Increases resources for Kinship Navigator programs, as described above. Also provides grants for Family Group Decision-making Meetings, Intensive Family Finding activities, and Residential Family-Based Substance Abuse Treatment, all of which can help children stay safely with family members and out of foster care or, once in care, return safely to their parents or find permanence with other relatives.

- **Keeping Siblings Together.** Preserves the sibling bond for children by requiring states to make reasonable efforts to place siblings together when they must be removed from their parents' home, provided it is in the children's best interests. In the case of siblings not placed together, states must make reasonable efforts to provide for frequent visitation or other ongoing interaction, unless such interaction would be harmful to any of the siblings.

IMPROVING OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH IN FOSTER CARE

- **Foster Care for Older Youth.** Helps youth who turn 18 in foster care without permanent families to remain in care, at state option, to age 19, 20, or 21 with continued federal support to increase their opportunities for success as they transition to adulthood.
- **Educational Stability.** Helps children and youth in foster care, guardianship and adoption achieve their educational goals by requiring that states ensure that they attend school and, when placed in foster care, they remain in their same school where appropriate, or, when a move is necessary, get help transferring promptly to a new school; also provides increased federal support to assist with school-related transportation costs.
- **Health Care Coordination.** Helps improve health care for children and youth in foster care by requiring the state child welfare agency to work with the state Medicaid agency to create a plan to better coordinate health care for these children in order to ensure appropriate screenings and assessments and follow-up treatment and to assure sharing of critical information with appropriate providers and oversight of prescription medications.

INCREASING SUPPORT FOR AMERICAN INDIAN AND ALASKA NATIVE CHILDREN

- **Direct Access to Federal Support for Indian Tribes.** Offers, for the first time, many American Indian and Alaska Native children federal assistance and protections through the federal foster care and adoption assistance programs that hundreds of thousands of other children are eligible for already.
- **Technical Assistance and Implementation Services.** Requires HHS to provide technical assistance and implementation services dedicated to improving services and permanency outcomes for Indian children and their families.

IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF STAFF WORKING WITH CHILDREN IN THE CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM

- **Extended Federal Support for Training of Staff.** Expands the availability of federal training dollars, on a phased-in basis, to reach more of those caring for and working with children in the child welfare system, including relative guardians, staff of private child welfare agencies, court personnel, attorneys, guardian ad litem, and court appointed special advocates.

For further information or for a copy of a more detailed description of H.R. 6893/P.L. 110-351, please contact Beth Davis-Pratt at the Children's Defense Fund at (202) 662-3629 or edavis-pratt@childrensdefense.org