



June 13, 2016

The Honorable Kevin Brady
Chairman, Committee on Ways and Means
U.S. House of Representatives

The Honorable Sandy Levin
Ranking Member, Committee on Ways and Means
U.S. House of Representatives

The Honorable Orrin Hatch
Chairman, Committee on Finance
U.S. Senate

The Honorable Ron Wyden
Ranking Member, Committee on Finance
U.S. Senate

The Honorable Vern Buchanan
Chairman, Human Resources Subcommittee
Committee on Ways and Means
U.S. House of Representatives

The Honorable Lloyd Doggett
Ranking Member, Human Resources Subcommittee
Committee on Ways and Means
U.S. House of Representative

Dear Ways and Means and Senate Finance Committee Chairmen Brady and Hatch, Ranking Members Levin and Wyden and Human Resources Subcommittee Chairman Buchanan and Ranking Member Doggett:

One of the Children's Defense Fund (CDF)'s first reports decades ago was *Children without Homes: An Examination of Public Responsibility to Children in Out-of-Home Care* and we have been unrelenting since in our advocacy for children who come to the attention of the child welfare system and their families. Today I offer CDF's full support of the proposed Family First Prevention Services Act. It takes historic and long overdue steps to direct federal child welfare dollars to improve outcomes for vulnerable children and families. I urge you to move toward a timely mark up in both the House and Senate so these vulnerable children do not have to wait longer for these important reforms.

Especially significant are the redirected funds in the Act for services and programs to assist children at risk of foster care to remain safely with parents or family caregivers. The proposal ensures quality prevention and treatment services for mental health and substance abuse problems that bring many families to the attention of the child welfare system. Such services and treatment are especially critical in responding to the current heroin and opioid epidemic, and we applaud additional provisions to address this crisis. The proposal also helps strengthen families and protect children by providing them in-home skill-based services. At the same time, it requires states to have a plan to track and prevent child maltreatment fatalities.

Chairmen and Ranking Members,
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The Family First Prevention Services Act takes important steps to ensure children who need foster care will be placed in the least-restrictive most family-like setting appropriate to their needs, and gives special attention to children whose emotional or other special needs require residential treatment. It continues to recognize and increase supports for grandparents and other relatives who step in to care for children when their parents cannot; addresses the special needs of pregnant and parenting teens and protections for their children; and offers supports to help older youth transition from foster care to adulthood. There is a continued important emphasis on ensuring permanent families for children.

This new proposal builds on your Committees' work on previous bipartisan and bicameral child welfare legislation. In fact, it was 36 years ago today, June 13th, 1980 that the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act was passed by Congress and then signed into law on June 17th. You followed that with the Adoption and Safe Families Act, the Foster Care Independence Act, the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act, and more recently the Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act, to name several, all of which included provisions to begin to better align federal funding with improved outcomes for vulnerable children and their families. The Family First Preventive Services Act now takes important next steps.

The Children's Defense Fund looks forward to working with all of you to make the proposed improvements for children in the Family First Prevention Services Act a reality. Thank you for your continuing leadership on behalf of these most vulnerable children and their families.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Marian Wright Edelman". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Marian Wright Edelman
President