

September xx, 2016

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Majority Leader  
United States Senate  
S-230 Capitol Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Harry Reid  
Minority Leader  
United States Senate  
S-221 Capitol Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Majority Leader McConnell and Minority Leader Reid:

On behalf of the undersigned organizations, we are writing to express support for and urge passage of H.R. 5456, the Family First Prevention Services Act. This bipartisan legislation passed the House of Representatives in June with overwhelming support. It is now time for the Senate to act. The legislation would strengthen families so more children could remain safely with their parents and family caregivers and avoid the need for foster care. Children do best in families and this legislation represents an historic step toward better aligning federal child welfare policy with this goal.

We represent advocates for children, youth and families, public and private providers, foster parents, adoptive parents, kinship caregivers and alumni of foster care. We applaud the Act's steps to provide federal investments in evidence-based prevention and early intervention to keep more children safely with their parents and family caregivers and out of foster care. Specifically, the Act would allow states to access federal funding under Title IV-E of the Social Security Act for quality mental health and substance abuse prevention and treatment services and in-home parent skill-based programs. These and other provisions in the Act would support states and communities in responding to the national opioid crisis, which has increased child welfare caseloads and left thousands of families and children vulnerable.

The Family First Prevention Services Act also aims to better ensure family-based care for children who need foster care. The legislation builds on current law's policy specifying that children should be placed in the least restrictive, most family-like setting appropriate for their special needs. Three years after its enactment federal dollars will be targeted only on children in family-foster homes or qualified residential settings for children and youth with special treatment needs or on those in special circumstances, such as pregnant and parenting teens or older youth in supervised independent living settings.

We urge you to take action on this important legislation by September 30, the end of the federal fiscal year. Senate passage of the Family First Prevention Services Act will truly benefit vulnerable children and families who come to the attention of child welfare systems. Thank you.

Sincerely,