

June 21, 2016

The Honorable Paul Ryan
Speaker of the House
United States House of Representatives
H-232 Capitol Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Minority Leader
United States House of Representatives
233 Cannon Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Speaker of the House Ryan and Minority Leader Pelosi:

As organizations representing advocates for children, youth and families, public and private providers, foster parents, adoptive parents, kinship caregivers and alumni of foster care, we are writing in support of the bipartisan, bicameral Family First Prevention Services Act, H.R. 5456. This legislation represents an historic step forward by better aligning federal child welfare funding with improved outcomes and goals for children and families who come into contact with the child welfare system. Over the decades Congress has approved many bipartisan, bicameral child welfare bills to better meet the needs of our most vulnerable children and families, and the Family First Prevention Services Act continues to make important gains for children.

We applaud the historic step the Act takes to increase federal investments in prevention to keep more children safely with their parents or family caregivers and out of foster care. The Act would allow funds under Title IV-E of the Social Security Act, now used primarily for out-of-home care for children, to be used for quality mental health and substance abuse prevention and treatment services and in-home parent skill-based programs. Requirements that these new services be evidence-based and trauma-informed, along with data reporting on performance outcomes, helps to ensure the quality of and accountability for services provided. These and other provisions in the Act also recognize the current challenges created by the opioid and heroin crises in many states.

The Family First Prevention Services Act over time also will take important steps to ensure children who need foster care will be placed in the least restrictive setting appropriate to their needs, by targeting federal dollars only on children in family-foster homes or residential settings for children and youth with special treatment needs or those in special circumstances, such as pregnant and parenting teens or older youth in independent living settings. The Act builds on activities in a number of states to preserve group care for children with special treatment needs.

The Act includes a number of other important changes to help improve outcomes for children and families. It continues to recognize the special role grandparents and other relatives play when they step in to care for children when their parents cannot and the supports relative caregivers need; requires states to have a plan to track and prevent child maltreatment fatalities; addresses the special needs of pregnant and parenting teens and protections for their children; promotes permanent families for children by extending adoption and guardianship incentives, enhancing interstate placements of children, and ensuring appropriate investments in post-adoption services; continues the Court Improvement Program; and offers increased supports to help older youth transition from foster care to adulthood.

Children and society pay a high cost when current systems fail to adequately address the needs of the children who come to the attention of our child welfare systems. We believe the specific changes proposed will go far in encouraging state and local child welfare agencies, private providers, courts, and advocates for children and families, including those who have been involved in the child welfare system, to work together to achieve significant change for children over the next decade.

The Family First Prevention Services Act will truly benefit vulnerable children and families who come to the attention of the child welfare system. We urge strong bipartisan support of H.R. 5456. Thank you.

Sincerely,

National Organizations:

Adoption Exchange Association
American Academy of Pediatrics
American Psychological Association
Association of University Centers on Disabilities
Center for Native American Youth
Center for the Study of Social Policy
Child Care Aware® of America
Children and Family Futures
Children's Home Society of America
Children's Hospital Association
Children's Rights
Children's Advocacy Institute
Children's Defense Fund
Children's Leadership Council
CLASP
Coalition on Human Needs
CSH (Corporation for Supportive Housing)
Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption
Every Child Matters
First Focus Campaign for Children
Foster Family-based Treatment Association
FosterClub
Generations United
Healthy Teen Network
Human Rights Project for Girls (Rights4Girls)
Juvenile Law Center
National African American Drug Policy Coalition, Inc.
National Alliance of Children's Trust and Prevention Funds
National Association for Children of Alcoholics
National Association for Children's Behavioral Health

National Association of Counsel for Children
National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners
National Association of Social Workers
National Center on Adoption and Permanency
National Center on Child Welfare and Housing
National Center on Shared Leadership®
National Child Abuse Coalition
National Children's Alliance
National Family Preservation Network
National Foster Parent Association
National Indian Child Welfare Association
National Kinship Alliance for Children
North American Council on Adoptable Children
Parents Anonymous® Inc.
Ray E. Helfer Society
Strengthening Families All Across America
The Dalton Daley Group
The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy
The National Crittenton Foundation
Think of Us
Voice for Adoption
Youth Law Center
Youth Villages
ZERO TO THREE

State Organizations:

Adoptive and Foster Families of Maine, Inc. and the Kinship Program
AAJ Research & Evaluation (Florida)
Arizona's Children Association
CASA Youth Advocates (Pennsylvania)
Child and Family Services of New Hampshire
Children & Families First (Delaware)
Children Awaiting Parents (New York)
Children's Action Alliance (Arizona)
Children's Home + Aid (Illinois)
Children's Home Society of North Carolina
Children's Advocacy Alliance (Nevada)
Children's Defense Fund - California
Children's Defense Fund - Minnesota
Children's Defense Fund - Mississippi
Children's Defense Fund - New York
Children's Defense Fund - Texas
Children's Hospital of Wisconsin
Citizens' Committee for Children of New York, Inc.
Connecticut Voices for Children

Dakota Boys and Girls Ranch (North Dakota)
Florida's Children First, Inc.
Foster Adopt Connect (Missouri and Kansas)
Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota
Lutheran Social Services of Indiana
Massachusetts Adoption Resource Exchange
Massachusetts Law Reform Institute
Partners for Our Children (Washington)
The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia
The Children's Partnership (California)
University of California Davis Guardian Professions Program
Voices for Children in Nebraska
Voices for Ohio's Children
Voices for Virginia's Children
YMCA of San Diego County, Kinship Support Program