

July 12, 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:

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 and its passage this week before the summer recess. Thank you.

Sincerely,

*National Organizations:*

Adoption Exchange Association  
American Academy of Pediatrics  
American Association of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry  
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  
Covenant House International  
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  
Girls Inc.  
Healthy Families America  
Healthy Teen Network  
Human Rights Project for Girls (Rights4Girls)  
Juvenile Law Center  
Lutheran Services in America

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 for Youth Law  
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 Court Appointed Special Advocate Association  
National Family Preservation Network  
National Foster Parent Association  
National Indian Child Welfare Association  
National Kinship Alliance for Children  
National Respite Coalition  
North American Council on Adoptable Children  
Parents Anonymous® Inc.  
Prevent Child Abuse America  
Ray E. Helfer Society  
School Social Work Association of America (SSWAA)  
Strengthening Families All Across America  
The Arc  
The Children's Partnership  
The Children's Village  
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:*

AAJ Research & Evaluation (Florida)  
Adoptive and Foster Families of Maine, Inc. and the Kinship Program  
Adoptive and Foster families of Maine Inc.  
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 First for Oregon  
Children's Action Alliance (Arizona)  
Children's Home + Aid (Illinois)  
Children's Home Society of North Carolina  
Children's Trust Fund of Oregon/Prevent Child Abuse Oregon  
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)  
Families And Children Together (Maine)  
Florida's Children First, Inc.  
Foster Adopt Connect (Missouri and Kansas)  
Gift of Hope, Grandparents and Others Raising America's Children (Illinois)  
Girls Inc. of Alameda County, CA  
Girls Inc. of Carpinteria, CA  
Girls Inc. of Greater Los Angeles, CA  
Girls Inc. of Greater Santa Barbara, CA  
Girls Inc. of Long Island  
Girls Inc. of New York City  
Girls Inc. of Orange County, CA  
Girls Inc. of the Greater Capital Region (New York)  
Girls Inc. of the Island City in the city of Alameda, CA  
Girls Inc. of Westchester  
Grandfamilies PTSA, Inc. (Florida)  
HALOS (South Carolina)  
Harlem Dowling-West Side Center for Children and Family Services  
Heartland Family Resource Center  
HopeSparks (Tacoma, WA)  
Kinship Families Coalition of Kentucky  
Lutheran Child and Family Services of Illinois  
Lutheran Family and Children's Services of Missouri  
Lutheran Family Services of Virginia  
Lutheran Family Services Rocky Mountains (CO, NM)  
Lutheran Services Florida  
Lutheran Social Ministries of New Jersey  
Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota  
Lutheran Social Services of Indiana  
Lutheran Social Services of Nevada  
Lutheran Social Services of New York

Many Lights Foundation (Washington)  
Massachusetts Adoption Resource Exchange  
Massachusetts Law Reform Institute  
Nebraska Appleseed  
New Mexico Voices for Children  
Open Arms (Kentucky)  
Partners for Our Children (Washington)  
RAPP (Relatives As Parents Program) (West Virginia)  
The Children's Home Society of New Jersey  
The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia  
Treehouse (Washington)  
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

cc: The Honorable Orrin Hatch  
The Honorable Ron Wyden  
The Honorable Chuck Grassley  
The Honorable Michael Bennet