

The Honorable Ron Wyden
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Wyden:

We are writing to thank you for your leadership on and continued attention to the needs of America's children, and to express our support for the Promoting Accountability and Excellence in Child Welfare Act of 2011. As representatives of organizations committed to improving the health and well-being of children and families, we are pleased that the Promoting Accountability and Excellence in Child Welfare Act seeks to provide incentives for States to improve the well-being of children in the child welfare system through systemic reforms and innovations, increased collaboration between State agencies, and incorporation of higher standards of accountability.

Since the authorization of the very first federal grants for child welfare services in the 1930s, states have made considerable strides to address the needs of children and families entering the child welfare system, but we need to do more. Critical limitations of the existing federal child welfare financing structure limit the ability of states to provide a diverse array of services to families in need and call attention to the need for a comprehensive reform of the fiscal system. While reform is needed, it may take time for Congress to pass comprehensive child welfare financing legislation. Absent a broader reform of the financing structure, states are now in need of greater flexibility to implement comprehensive reforms to existing child welfare programs. We are pleased that the Promoting Accountability and Excellence in Child Welfare Act would establish a 5 year grant program to give states and localities greater flexibility to implement comprehensive reforms to existing child welfare programs provided they can demonstrate success in improving child well-being.

Among other provisions, we are pleased that the bill establishes annual performance measures that must be achieved, with an emphasis on implementing reforms and methods for achieving significant results that improve the well-being of all children in the child welfare system. Additionally, it encourages: (a) partnerships between participating State and local agencies and organizations and a demonstration of shared accountability for child well-being; and, (b) collaboration among agencies responsible for administering programs that affect the child welfare system by requiring an inter-agency working group that includes representatives from the Department of Education, the Department of Labor, the Department of Justice and the Department of Housing and Urban Development, in order to identify existing Federal financial resources that can be used to provide additional resources to grantees.

We are also pleased that the Promoting Accountability and Excellence in Child Welfare Act requires that the Secretary provides a report to Congress on recommendations for legislative or administrative action necessary to eliminate the AFDC income eligibility requirements for purposes of foster care maintenance payments under title IV-E. We believe that changes to the eligibility requirements for title IV-E foster care payments are long overdue. As it stands, eligibility for federal foster care assistance remains tied to the defunct AFDC program. As a result, the federal commitment to foster care has followed a steady downward trend, and each year a greater share of the burden to provide for children in care shifts onto states. The percentage of children eligible for federal foster care assistance was estimated to be less than half of all children in foster care in 2006 (43%) as compared to a high of over 50% in the mid-to late 1990s. As such, states are forced to

compensate by drawing funds from other programs such as Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) and the Social Security Block Grant (SSBG) to provide for children in care.

The Promoting Accountability and Excellence in Child Welfare Act provides states with critical funding to improve the well-being of children in the child welfare system through systemic reforms and innovations, and paves the way for broader reforms to the child welfare system. We are grateful for your leadership in introducing the Promoting Accountability and Excellence in Child Welfare Act, and we look forward to working with you to ensure passage of this critical legislation.

Sincerely,

Advocates for Children and Youth

Advocates for Children of New Jersey

Arkansas Voices for the Children Left Behind

Bazon Center for Mental Health Law

Black Administrators in Child Welfare

Brighter Beginnings

California Council of Churches IMPACT

Casa Esperanza

Center for the Study of Social Policy

Child and Family Policy Center

Child Welfare League of America

Children First for Oregon

Children's Law Center

Clinical Social Work Association

Community Action Partnership

Community Partnerships for Children and Families

Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption

First Focus

Florida Equal Justice Center

Forum for Youth Investment

Foster Care to Success Foundation

Foster Family-based Treatment Association

Harlem Children's Zone

Healthy Schools Network

Illinois Maternal and Child Health Coalition

Juvenile Law Center

Kentucky Youth Advocates

Maine Children's Alliance

Mental Health America

Michigan's Children

National Alliance for Children's Trust and Prevention Funds

National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth

National Association of Elementary School Principals

National Association of Secondary School Principals

National CASA Association

National Center for Housing & Child Welfare

New Mexico Voices for Children

Oklahoma Therapeutic Foster Care Association

Oregon Prevention, Education, Recovery Association

Parent Support Network

Park Heights Renaissance

Project IRENE

Providence Connections

Public Children Services Assoc of Ohio

Public Education Network

Results Leadership Group

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT

Rhode Island Foster Parent Association

School Social Work Association of America

Shriver Center on Poverty Law

StandUp For Kids

Texans Care for Children

TexProtects, The Texas Association for the Protection of Children

The Black Children's Institute of Tennessee

The Children's Partnership

The Committee for Hispanic Children and Families

The Every Child Matters Education Fund

The National Policy Partnership for Children of Incarcerated Parents

Voices for America's Children

Voices for Children in Nebraska

Voices for Utah Children

Voices for Virginia's Children

Wisconsin Council on Children and Families