



The Honorable John A. Boehner
Speaker of the House
1011 Longworth House Office Building
Washington D.C 20515

The Honorable Eric Cantor
U.S. House Majority Leader
303 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
U.S. House Minority Leader
235 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

July 2, 2014

Dear Speaker Boehner, Majority Leader Cantor and Minority Leader Pelosi,

On behalf of the First Focus Campaign for Children, a bipartisan advocacy organization dedicated to making children and families a priority in federal policy and budget decisions, I would like to express our support for the “*Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act*.” This legislation includes critical provisions aimed at improving outcomes for children and youth who are at-risk of being sexually trafficked, prioritizes “normalcy” for children in the foster care system, provides incentives to states for increasing adoptions and guardianships, and strengthens supports for children in foster and adoptive families. We urge you to move H.R. 4980 forward in the House and ensure its swift passage so that vulnerable children and youth can benefit from these critical reforms.

A primary goal of H.R. 4980 is to reduce the incidence of sex trafficking of domestic minors. Estimates suggest that anywhere from 100,000-300,000 children are at risk for trafficking each year in the United States. Many of these child victims also come into contact with the child welfare system at some point in their lives. We are pleased that this legislation requires the collection of data on and reporting of children in the foster care system that have been sexually trafficked or have runaway. Doing so will ensure that program development can be informed by data and that programs and services are appropriately tailored to the needs of vulnerable youth. Importantly, H.R. 4980 also establishes a National Advisory Committee on the Sex Trafficking of Children and Youth, tasked with developing guidelines and recommendations for states and the federal government on how best to tackle sex trafficking of children and youth. We believe that this Advisory Committee will develop critical strategies needed for increasing coordination between agencies and trainings to caseworkers and other key professionals based on best practice models and available data.

H.R. 4980 also addresses the critical need for program and policies to promote normalcy in the lives of foster youth. In order to encourage participation in activities and experiences that their non-foster peers engage in, this bill establishes the “reasonable prudent parent” standard for foster parents. This standard enables caretakers to more appropriately make decisions that support positive youth development, well-

being and promote the best interest of children in their care. The bill also provides for the inclusion of children over the age of 14 in their case plan development, eliminates the Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement (AAPLA) option for youth under 16, encourages placements with siblings, and importantly, requires that youth who leave the foster care system are provided with essential documents, including their birth certificate, a social security card, health insurance information, medical records, and a driver's license or state identification card. The provisions in this bipartisan bill are fundamental to empowering foster youth and promoting positive experiences for youth in care, all of which will aid their success as they transition to adulthood and independence.

In addition, H.R. 4980 aims to improve permanency outcomes for children in care in several ways. This legislation reauthorizes the Adoption Incentives Program and Family Connections Grants, programs that will increase the likelihood that foster children will have more opportunities to establish permanent, safe and supportive relationships in a timely fashion.

We recognize that The "*Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act*" is the result of a committed bipartisan effort aimed at improving outcomes for children in the child welfare system. We urge you to bring this bill to the floor in the House and ensure its swift passage. Thank you for your leadership and we look forward to working with you to improve the health and wellbeing of all of our nation's children.

Sincerely,



Bruce Lesley
President