

May 4, 2015

The Honorable Orrin Hatch
Chairman, Senate Finance Committee
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Ron Wyden
Ranking Member, Senate Finance Committee
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Hatch and Ranking Member Wyden:

As representatives of organizations committed to improving the health, safety and wellbeing of our nation's children and families, we are writing to urge your support for the Administration's FY 2016 child welfare budget proposals that seek to strengthen and make targeted investments in services and supports for abused and neglected children, including those in foster care across the country.

These proposals increase investments in evidence-based prevention and post-permanency supports for children at risk of entering foster care, encourage the broader use of family-based care including kinship care rather than congregate care for children and youth, and reduce overprescribing of psychotropic medications for children and youth in foster care, all areas of interest to the Committee. As a community, we share the Administration's vision for improving the child welfare system and firmly believe that investments in such a broad array of services and programs will help us to better serve vulnerable children and families.

Historically federal child welfare dollars have favored foster care over services that support and strengthen families. Recently child welfare waiver demonstration projects have helped states shift resources and efforts away from foster care maintenance and toward prevention, intervention and treatment approaches and highlighted the benefits of such investments. The Administration's Budget builds on lessons from the waivers and reinforces the importance of increased federal support for a range of prevention and early intervention services for children, youth and families who come to the attention of the child welfare system.

Title IV-E waiver authority was an opportunity to test innovation and learn about what works best for meeting the critical needs of children and families who come to the attention of the child welfare system. However, these waivers will end in FY 2019 making it even more urgent that we invest now to sustain a range of prevention and early intervention services for children, youth and families involved in child welfare. Recognizing that waivers were meant to be temporary and informative, we know that greater long-term federal investments are needed to keep children safe and in permanent families.

We urge your support and leadership to ensure passage and adequate funding for the child welfare system improvements outlined in the Administration's FY 2016 budget. We stand ready to work with you to enact the following critical initiatives outlined within the Administration's FY2016 Budget:

- Increase federal investments on the front-end of the child welfare service delivery system to prevent removals and foster care placements for children by allowing title IV-E funds to be used for evidence-based and evidence-informed pre-placement services for candidates for foster care and post-placement services. This includes supports and services for children who have been diverted from the child welfare system and placed with kin.
- Amend title IV-E to promote specialized family-based care as an alternative to congregate care for children with behavioral health needs and provide oversight when congregate placements are used.
- Create a five-year Administration for Children and Families/Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services demonstration to encourage states to implement evidence-based psychosocial interventions to improve outcomes for children and youth in foster care suffering from trauma, while reducing the current over-prescription of psychotropic medications for foster children.
- Allow title IV-E agencies to use Chafee Foster Care Independence Program funds to serve young people formerly in foster care through the age of 23.
- Provide enhanced capacity building funds for Indian tribes, tribal organizations or consortia that are approved to operate a title IV-E program to assist with implementing the program.

These proposed federal child welfare investments provide an important vehicle for supporting states in efforts to improve the health and wellbeing outcomes for child welfare involved children, youth and families, some of the most vulnerable in our society.

Vulnerable children and families need your support. Thank you for your leadership on these critical reforms.

Sincerely,

Children's Defense Fund
Child Welfare League of America
First Focus Campaign for Children
Foster Family-based Treatment Association
Generations United
National Foster Care Coalition
Voice for Adoption