



FIRST FOCUS
CAMPAIGN FOR CHILDREN

April 20, 2017

The Honorable Roy Blunt
United States Senate
260 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Blunt:

I am writing on behalf of First Focus Campaign for Children, a bipartisan children's advocacy organization dedicated to making children and families the priority in federal budget and policy decisions, to thank you for your leadership in introducing the Timely Mental Health for Foster Youth Act (S. 439).

Each year there are over 400,000 children in the foster care system. These youth have often experienced traumatic events such as abuse, neglect, or exposure to substances, which can have significant impacts on their physical and mental health. According to the Congressional Research Service, 50-75 percent of young people entering foster care show behavioral or social competency problems. Because of the prevalence of mental health issues among this population it is vital that their needs be met as timely and as effectively as possible.

While some states require children entering the foster care system to undergo physical and mental health screenings, the timeline requirements for these screenings vary from state to state. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, "the consensus among experts in foster care health calls for a mental health evaluation within 30 days of placement." Expedient screening for mental health issues is important for early detection and prevention efforts for these children.

The Timely Mental Health for Foster Youth Act would require mental health screenings for all children entering foster care. The initial screening would take place within 30 days of a child being placed into foster care. In addition, for those screenings that identify a need, it would require that a complete assessment be completed no later than 60 days after placement. Early identification and intervention will help to ensure better outcomes for children and families in the foster care system.

We are grateful for your leadership in making children and families a legislative priority, and we look forward to working with you on this and other proposals to improve the well-being of America's children and youth. Should you have any questions about this letter, please contact Richa Mathur at richam@firstfocus.org.

Sincerely,

Bruce Lesley