

House Committee on Appropriations

Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies

**Congressman James R. Langevin (RI-02)**

*Testimony -- March 1, 2017*

Thank you, Chairman Frelinghuysen and Ranking Member Lowey, for holding this hearing and inviting Members of Congress to testify today. I appreciate the opportunity to highlight three initiatives that would not only positively impact my home state of Rhode Island, but help to improve the lives of people across the nation. These initiatives include: (1) funding the *Lifespan Respite Care Act* to safeguard the health of family caregivers while protecting the continuum of quality care for people with a disability or chronic illness; (2) investing in the *Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act* to prepare students for the demands of the 21<sup>st</sup> century economy; and (3) supporting the *Adoption Opportunities* program to help find permanent families for youth in foster care.

First, I respectfully request \$5 million for *Lifespan Respite Care Act* programs, which have been funded at approximately \$2.5 million per year since FY 2009. When I championed the enactment of this law back in 2006, it was with first-hand knowledge of the tremendous difference a dedicated caregiver can make in the life of a person with a disability or chronic condition.

The Lifespan Respite program is the only federal initiative that exclusively concentrates on respite, and does not restrict program eligibility based on the age or veteran status of the individual receiving care. More than 35 states and the District of Columbia have received grants under this program, bolstering coordinated community systems that are often the only avenue for our nation's families struggling to care for a loved one in need.

Continued federal support for the development and coordination of these respite care programs across the country is crucial to improving the life of family caregivers, maintaining options for care settings, and saving Americans money.

Caregivers need, and deserve, relief from the physical and emotional responsibility of caring for a person with a chronic illness or disability. Lifespan Respite programs help caregivers manage stress, thereby mitigating the development of physical and mental health issues associated with the strain of their role.

Respite care programs also help to delay, or in some instances avoid, nursing home entry, which strengthens families and improves the well-being of all parties. The reduction of hospitalization alleviates pressure on the health care system and the costs associated with providing medical care. Nationally, caregivers provided an estimated \$470 billion in uncompensated family caregiving in 2013, more than total federal and state Medicaid spending for that year. Shifting those costs to our hospitals, medical centers, and nursing homes in an already fragile environment is unnecessary and can be prevented if we continue to invest in respite services.

Respite is about more than providing caregivers a chance to recharge. The Lifespan Respite Program is about creating, and continuing to support, an infrastructure that serves our communities and alleviates preventable institutionalized health care—especially when there are people with a disability or illness who want to remain at home, and there are families who are willing to provide that quality care for their loved ones.

I also respectfully request strong support for the *Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act* (Perkins).

Career and Technical Education (CTE) ensures students of all ages are career and college-ready, and Perkins provides the largest federal CTE investment in high schools and community and technical colleges across the country. During the 2013-2014 school years, more than 12 million students participated in secondary and postsecondary CTE programs in the United States. However, many CTE programs are experiencing reductions in funding.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, many of the fastest-growing jobs through 2022 will be in CTE fields, including STEM, health care, skilled trades, IT, and marketing. Many employers already report that they are unable to recruit workers for open positions. In fact, the skilled trades are the hardest jobs to fill in the United States, with recent data citing 1,019,000 jobs open in the trade, transportation and utilities sector, and 315,000 jobs open in manufacturing.

Perkins grants help close this skills gap. They allow institutions to develop strong educational pathways for students, strengthen career guidance and counseling, provide professional development for educators, purchase equipment for classrooms, ensure access for underserved populations, and promote strong school accountability systems. Investment in Perkins ensures our students are learning relevant technical and employability skills, and it has strong bipartisan support.

Last Congress, the House overwhelmingly passed H.R. 5587, the Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Act, by a vote of 405-5. While we continue to work on the reauthorization of Perkins in the new Congress, I urge you to continue supporting strong funding for CTE so we may invest in our students and our economy.

Lastly, I respectfully request \$50 million for the *Adoption Opportunities* program. In FY2016, it was funded at \$39.1 million, with \$4 million dedicated to state grants for testing child-focused parent recruitment.

On any given day, over 427,000 children are living in foster care across the country, awaiting adoption by a loving, caring family. Unfortunately, children who enter the child welfare system after age 14 are much more likely to age out of foster care than be adopted. In 2015, 20,789 children aged out of the foster care system. Already at a disadvantage, these children end up without a network of support, especially in times of crisis.

More than half of children who have aged out of foster care experience episodes of homelessness and 25 percent do not receive a high school diploma or GED. Only six percent of children finish a two or four year degree after aging out. They are more likely to be unemployed, receive public assistance, and become involved in the criminal justice system. It is our moral responsibility to care for these children as we would our own.

The *Adoption Opportunities* program supports permanent solutions for youth in foster care. It encourages the adoption of older children, as well as minorities and children with special needs, and provides postadoption support to families. Investing in these services not only improves the quality of life for children, it results in long-term government and societal savings. A Department of Health and Human Services Children's Bureau study found that, "approximately \$65,422 to \$126,825 is saved for every child who is adopted rather than placed in long-term foster care."

We must commit to funding *Adoption Opportunities*, because, simply put, every child deserves to have a family.

I want to once again thank you for receiving my testimony and taking my requests into consideration for the Fiscal Year 2018 Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education bill. The programs and initiatives I have highlighted today help shape the lives of Americans at various stages of life. From finding loving homes for children in foster care, to offering crucial career services and technical learning opportunities, to ensuring caregivers who provide a much needed service to those in need receive care themselves. These programs matter, they strengthen our communities, and they uphold our nation's promise of compassion, equality, and opportunity.