



Testimony for the Record
Submitted to the
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Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies
Subcommittee
For the Hearing
“Advancing Permanency in Child Welfare:
Leveraging Federal Funding for Adoption Programs”
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Chairman Aderholt, Ranking Member DeLauro, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for inviting me to participate in this hearing and for elevating the importance of adoption and family permanency in the United States.

My name is Kate McLean, and I am proud to serve as the Executive Director of the Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute (CCAI). CCAI is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization founded in 2001 to eliminate barriers that prevent children from experiencing the safety, stability, and permanency of family. Family permanency means a child has the safety and belonging that comes from knowing they are part of a permanent family who will love and support them for a lifetime. Legally, this may include adoption, kinship guardianship, or reunification, but true permanency also requires the relational and emotional stability every child needs to thrive.

For 25 years, CCAI has served as a trusted source of information, expertise, and resources for Members of Congress and the Adoption Caucus, the Congressional Coalition on Adoption (CCA), on family permanency issues both domestically and globally. As the historically largest bipartisan, bicameral caucus in Congress, the Adoption Caucus reflects a strong and enduring commitment to children and families. CCAI extends its sincere appreciation to Chairman Aderholt, Co-Chair of the Caucus, for his leadership, and to Ranking Member DeLauro and Representatives Bice, Letlow, Moolenaar, and Pocan for their longstanding and active membership.

CCAI raises awareness among policymakers by connecting them directly with adoptees, foster youth, foster and adoptive families, and birth parents to ensure legislative decisions reflect real-world experiences. Programs like Angels in Adoption® and the Foster Youth Internship Program® create opportunities for Congress to meet and learn from these constituents and their important lived experiences firsthand.



Adoption is at the heart of CCAI’s mission. It is a vital option when it is not safe or possible to return home; adoptions can include kinship adoption, international adoption, domestic adoption through a private agency or foster care public agency. Adoption offers children the chance to belong, to be cared for and supported throughout life, and to know they will always have family to share holidays, milestones, and everyday moments. CCAI can attest that adoption and the welfare of children have long been a bipartisan priority, and this Committee’s ongoing support sends a clear message that Congress recognizes the fundamental principle that children thrive best in safe, nurturing, permanent families, and that every child deserves the opportunity to do so.

Adoption has the power to create lifelong family connections when reunification is not possible, but it should strengthen, not replace, a child’s support network. Children eligible for adoption often have experienced disruptions in their “village of support.” Effective adoption practice preserves relationships, identity, and belonging while also providing the stability of a permanent family.

Federal adoption incentive programs, including the Adoption Opportunities and the Adoption and Legal Guardianship Incentive Payments, help youth in foster care, especially those with complex needs, find permanent families. These programs reward state practices that advance timely, child-centered adoptions and legal guardianships. Children with complex needs – older youth, sibling groups, or those with medical, developmental, or behavioral challenges – often face greater barriers to adoption, and these programs foster policies and opportunities that make lasting permanency possible.

I would like to share some stories that illustrate this impact. A couple from Tennessee in our Angels in Adoption® program welcomed five siblings into their home through foster care. With access to the supports, services, and resources they needed, the family was able to provide



stability and care for the children and ultimately adopted all five siblings. This shows how the proper supports can help families meet complex needs and ensure siblings can grow up together.

At the same time, gaps remain. A youth in Pennsylvania who participated in our Foster Youth Internship Program® shared that all three of his siblings once lived safely and happily with their grandmother in kinship care. Despite the loving placement, the children were removed and separated because the state required individual bedrooms, even though the siblings had shared rooms their entire lives and cherished it. This story illustrates that keeping sibling groups together is indeed complex and requires stronger, more consistent federal support. Siblings are often separated in care, which can weaken their relationships and hinder their ability to support one another. In this case, the family could have stayed together and avoided serious trauma if housing support had been available, but the agency lacked the resources and flexibility to provide it.

Another youth in our internship program from California shared that adoption could have provided stability, but college-related financial pressures made her feel she had to choose between adoption and higher education. This tension exists because federal programs like the John H. Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood generally limit supports to youth still in foster care at age 14 or older, or those who exit at age 16 or older for kinship guardianship or adoption. As a result, older youth can lose access to critical resources just when they need them most if moving forward with adoption pushes them outside program eligibility. Experiences like this underscore the complex needs of older youth, who often face difficult trade-offs between achieving permanency and accessing the supports necessary for success in adulthood.

These stories show progress while highlighting persistent challenges, especially for older youth, sibling groups, and other complex needs. Because these systems are multifaceted, there is



no single solution, and meaningful progress requires coordinated effort. Among many, three key priorities can strengthen outcomes and promote successful adoptions and family permanency:

Making Adoption More Accessible and Ethical: To ensure more children eligible for adoption are successfully placed, CCAI promotes increasing accessibility by encouraging the adoption of children with complex needs and removing barriers that might prevent families from providing lasting family permanency. For example, with the story from our California youth, making a deliberate effort to help older youth who want it find permanent families without forcing them to choose between family and critical supports like higher education. It also includes supporting sibling placements, like the family I shared from Tennessee keeping all five siblings together and removing financial or systemic barriers that may prevent adoption, as illustrated by the Pennsylvania youth's story. At the same time, adoption must uphold ethical standards that protect the rights and dignity of youth, birth families, and adoptive families, ensuring the process is transparent, voluntary, and child-centered rather than driven by coercion or profit. By addressing both accessibility and ethics, adoption can better fulfill its promise of lasting family connections.

Ensuring Preparedness and Readiness for Adoption and Guardianship: CCAI recommends ensuring that all parties involved in adoption – adoptees, birth parents, and adoptive parents – are fully prepared, supported, and have a meaningful voice in the process to promote successful, lasting placements. Inadequate pre- and post-adoption supports may discourage families, increase the risk of disruption, or make adoption feel riskier or less sustainable. In some cases, incentive structures that prioritize finalized numbers over stability, along with policy shifts, eligibility changes, or court backlogs, can affect both the pace and durability of adoptions.

Prospective adoptive families may enter the process with varying expectations or without trauma-informed, adoption-competent training to meet a child's emotional and behavioral needs,



while youth often have limited input in placement decisions, which can undermine trust and long-term stability. Further, kinship caregivers are invaluable to permanency efforts, but oftentimes lack adequate financial resources or support, particularly when caring for youth with complex needs. Strengthening pre- and post-adoption services, adoption-competent training, and supports are all essential to ensure children and families thrive together.

Reducing Barriers and Strengthening the Permanency Workforce: CCAI recommends reducing legal and bureaucratic complexity and fostering a skilled permanency workforce to help children and families achieve permanency efficiently and effectively. Shortages of trained permanency specialists and court personnel delay case movement. Legal and procedural requirements vary widely by state and country, oftentimes creating delays and stress for families navigating adoption. Domestic adoptions may be slowed by prolonged court proceedings, backlogs, or bureaucratic procedural steps, while international adoptions can be disrupted by changes in foreign laws or political shifts. At the same time, recruiting, retaining, and training quality adoption and guardianship permanency specialists is critical to program success, supports youth-centered outcomes, and enables states to implement evidence-based practices. By streamlining processes and building workforce capacity, the system can better protect children while moving them toward permanent, nurturing families without unnecessary delays.

I urge the Subcommittee to prioritize funding for policies and programs that uphold the rights, dignity, and well-being of children and families, expand access to family permanency, support families before and after placement, and invest in a skilled workforce to ensure every child has a safe, nurturing, and permanent family. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of the life-changing impact that adoption and family permanency make possible.