

INCREASING ADOPTIONS FROM FOSTER CARE

HEARING
BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON HUMAN RESOURCES
OF THE
COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
ONE HUNDRED THIRTEENTH CONGRESS
FIRST SESSION

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INCREASING ADOPTIONS FROM FOSTER CARE

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 27, 2013

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON HUMAN RESOURCES,
Washington, DC.

The Subcommittee met, pursuant to call, at 4:13 p.m., in Room 1100, Longworth House Office Building, Hon. Dave Reichert [Chairman of the Subcommittee] presiding.
[The advisory announcing the hearing follows:]

ADVISORY

FROM THE COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS

SUBCOMMITTEE ON HUMAN RESOURCES

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Wednesday, February 20, 2013
No. HR-01

CONTACT: (202) 225-3625

Chairman Reichert Announces Hearing on Increasing Adoptions from Foster Care

Congressman Dave Reichert (R-WA), Chairman of the Subcommittee on Human Resources of the Committee on Ways and Means, today announced that the Subcommittee will hold a hearing on increasing adoptions from foster care, including through the Adoption Incentives program. **The hearing will take place immediately following the Subcommittee organizational meeting that begins at 2:00 p.m. on Wednesday, February 27, 2013, in Room 1100 of the Longworth House Office Building.**

In view of the limited time available to hear from witnesses, oral testimony at this hearing will be from invited witnesses only. Witnesses will include experts from organizations that have had success in increasing adoptions from foster care. However, any individual or organization not scheduled for an oral appearance may submit a written statement for consideration by the Committee and for inclusion in the printed record of the hearing.

BACKGROUND:

Congress began providing Federal financial support for adoption as part of Public Law 96-272, the *Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980*, with a goal of reducing the number of children in foster care. In 1997, Congress enacted Public Law 105-89, *The Adoption and Safe Families Act*, to further increase the number of children leaving foster care for adoptive homes. This law created the Adoption Incentives program, which provides incentive payments to States that increase the number of adoptions over a base year level. Initially, States were eligible to receive incentive payments either for increases in the number of foster children adopted or for increases in the number of foster children with special needs placed in adoptive homes.

The program was extended by Public Law 108-145, the *Adoption Promotion Act of 2003*, which reset the State baselines and also added a new incentive payment category for adoptions of children age 9 and older. This new incentive category was created in response to research showing that once a child reached 8 or 9 years of age, he or she was more likely to remain in foster care than to be adopted.

Public Law 110-35, the *Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008*, again extended the program and reset the State baselines. This 2008 law doubled the incentive payments for adoptions of special needs children under age 9 and for older child adoptions. The 2008 law also authorized incentive payments for States that increased the *rate* of children adopted from foster care. The Adoption Incentives program is currently authorized through September 30, 2013, as is the Family Connection grants program which provides grants designed to better connect children in foster care to their relatives.

A number of organizations have developed proven methods for increasing the number of children who are adopted from foster care, contributing to recent success in advancing this goal. For example, some organizations focus on reexamining the adult relationships a foster youth has had during their time in foster care to determine if any of these adults may be possible adoptive parents. Others are building more in-depth relationships with a smaller caseload of foster youth to better understand their needs and desires to find the right home for the child.

In announcing the hearing, Chairman Reichert stated, **“While tens of thousands of children are adopted from foster care each year, twice as many foster children are still waiting for a permanent home. Past Federal efforts have increased support for adoptions and have helped States reduce the number of children in foster care each year. As we review the Adoption Incentives program in preparation for its reauthorization, we need to make sure these measures are still working well so we can ensure all children have a permanent home as quickly as possible. I look forward to hearing from leaders and experts alike about ways in which we can safely increase the number of children adopted from foster care, so every child has a permanent home and parents to call their own.”**

FOCUS OF THE HEARING:

The hearing will review successful efforts to increase adoptions of children from foster care. Leaders of several private organizations achieving significant success are expected to testify about their programs, as well as their views on reauthorizing the Adoption Incentives program.

DETAILS FOR SUBMISSION OF WRITTEN COMMENTS:

Please Note: Any person(s) and/or organization(s) wishing to submit for the hearing record must follow the appropriate link on the hearing page of the Committee website and complete the informational forms. From the Committee homepage, <http://waysandmeans.house.gov>, select “Hearings.” Select the hearing for which you would like to submit, and click on the link entitled, “Click here to provide a submission for the record.” Once you have followed the online instructions, submit all requested information. ATTACH your submission as a Word document, in compliance with the formatting requirements listed below, **by the close of business on Wednesday, March 13, 2013**. Finally, please note that due to the change in House mail policy, the U.S. Capitol Police will refuse sealed-package deliveries to all House Office Buildings. For questions, or if you encounter technical problems, please call (202) 225-1721 or (202) 225-3625.

FORMATTING REQUIREMENTS:

The Committee relies on electronic submissions for printing the official hearing record. As always, submissions will be included in the record according to the discretion of the Committee. The Committee will not alter the content of your submission, but we reserve the right to format it according to our guidelines. Any submission provided to the Committee by a witness, any supplementary materials submitted for the printed record, and any written comments in response to a request for written comments must conform to the guidelines listed below. Any submission or supplementary item not in compliance with these guidelines will not be printed, but will be maintained in the Committee files for review and use by the Committee.

1. All submissions and supplementary materials must be provided in Word format and **MUST NOT** exceed a total of 10 pages, including attachments. Witnesses and submitters are advised that the Committee relies on electronic submissions for printing the official hearing record.

2. Copies of whole documents submitted as exhibit material will not be accepted for printing. Instead, exhibit material should be referenced and quoted or paraphrased. All exhibit material not meeting these specifications will be maintained in the Committee files for review and use by the Committee.

3. All submissions must include a list of all clients, persons, and/or organizations on whose behalf the witness appears. A supplemental sheet must accompany each submission listing the name, company, address, telephone, and fax numbers of each witness.

The Committee seeks to make its facilities accessible to persons with disabilities. If you are in need of special accommodations, please call 202-225-1721 or 202-226-3411 TDD/TTY in advance of the event (four business days notice is requested). Questions with regard to special accommodation needs in general (including availability of Committee materials in alternative formats) may be directed to the Committee as noted above.

Note: All Committee advisories and news releases are available online at <http://www.waysandmeans.house.gov/>.

Chairman REICHERT. I call this Subcommittee meeting to order. We welcome you to today's hearing. I can't think of a more important or more bipartisan topic than promoting adoption. This is an area where both parties have worked together to improve outcomes for children, which is what I would like to do whenever possible as the Chairman of this Subcommittee. I know Mr. Doggett agrees with that goal, and I look forward to working with all the Members to work productively toward that end. Of course, we won't always agree, but whether it involves adoption, data standards, or preventing wasteful spending, there is a lot we can do, and should do, together.

As Mr. Doggett mentioned, I have a background with 33 years in law enforcement, but also some personal experience in the adoption/foster care arena. Two of my grandchildren are adopted. I was a foster grandparent for a while for a number of children and also now, of course, an adoptive grandfather, and we are very proud of the fact that my daughter and her husband, my son-in-law, have adopted two little children: Emma, who was a crack cocaine, heroin-addicted baby when she was born; and Breyer, who was a meth-addicted baby when he was born. And you can imagine some of the challenges they now face as they grow older at 9 and 10 years old. But they now have a strong foundation, a loving family, and a good, strong base to start their lives from, which gives them so many more opportunities than they would have had.

On the other hand, as the sheriff and as a detective, a homicide detective, working in King County—and especially my memory goes back to the days working the Green River murder cases, if you are familiar with those, a series of murders of street people, women and young girls, 51 cases were closed. The suspect pled guilty to 49 murders. I worked with a lot of those young kids on the street. Those were kids who were in and out of foster homes, who weren't adopted, who were in their teens, early teens and late teens, some even younger. I would get calls at night at home: "I am at a phone booth, I ran away from my foster home." You take them to the YWCA and the YMCA; they run away from there.

You folks on the panel know this, have seen this yourselves, and have experience there. I know members on this panel have heart for this issue, and I wanted to share those stories with you so that you understand how close this is to me personally in so many different ways. And I could tell so many other stories, but we will move on.

As I said, not every child has been so lucky to have a home. For example, in the 10 years from 1987 through 1997, the number of children in foster care rose dramatically, climbing from 300,000 to 537,000. That surge in foster care caseloads is one of the reasons why Congress, led by our current Chairman Dave Camp, passed the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997. That law was designed to ensure more foster children were quickly adopted when they couldn't return to live safely with their parents.

The Adoption Incentives program, created as part of that law, was one key measure to encourage more adoption of children from foster care. In short, it rewards States if they increase the number of children leaving foster care for adoptive homes. We all know it worked. Since the passage of the Adoption and Safe Families Act,

foster care caseloads have fallen dramatically. After peaking at 567,000 in 1999, foster care caseloads have fallen by almost 30 percent. At the same time, adoptions from foster care increased in the late 1990s and remain much higher than before the law's passage.

Today we will review how the Adoption Incentives program supported these improvements. We will hear directly from adoption experts, including from organizations that have proven they can increase the number of children adopted from foster care, and we will start to consider whether we need to make changes to encourage even more adoptions.

In my view, the Federal Government should continue to support efforts to increase adoptions, as there are still over 100,000 children in foster care waiting to be adopted. These kids deserve a place to call home. They need someone who will commit to caring for them, and they deserve our best efforts to ensure that they are adopted.

Again, I look forward to the testimony of all of our witnesses today and also thank you so much for your patience. I am really interested in how we can work together to ensure more children grow up in a safe, loving, and permanent family.

Without objection, each Member will have the opportunity to submit a written statement and have it included in the record at this point.

I would like to recognize Mr. Doggett for his opening statement.

Mr. DOGGETT. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I believe that our Federal Adoption Incentives program, which provides financial awards to the States that increase the number of children adopted out of foster care above a certain baseline, is an important part of the effort, the joint bipartisan effort, to try to encourage permanent loving homes for children who are placed in foster care. These awards are due—and this program is due to expire at the end of September, not that far from now, and I am hopeful that we will be able to work together to reauthorize the program.

Under the Adoption Incentives program, the States become eligible for awards if they increase the number of total adoptions, those for children over age 9 that are adopted, and the adoption of children with special needs. The goal of the program is to incentivize and encourage the States to increase the adoptions out of foster care and to quickly move children who are unable to return to their parents into permanent homes. States must reinvest these payments back into services, such as postadoption services for children and families and other services generally provided under the child welfare system.

Forty-three million dollars is available for the program in this fiscal year. Since the program was created, as the Chairman described, roughly \$375 million has been awarded, and every State in the country has participated in the funding. In fiscal year 2011, Texas, my home State, received about \$7 million in incentives, the largest amount of any State in the country. San Antonio has been viewed as a particular model of success.

Bexar County has been creative in safely moving children into permanent homes. Each month there at the county courthouse, the county hosts an adoption day event that allows dozens of families

on the same day to complete their adoptions in a single day, and that happens every month. These proceedings have allowed countless children to have shorter stays in foster care and move more quickly into stable homes. I believe that judges in Bexar County understand they are responsible for getting children who experience abuse and neglect into a safer foster environment and, in addition, are responsible for placing that child with a permanent family if it does not become safe for the child to return home.

These improvements to the local adoption system, encouraged and utilized by child advocates like District Judge Peter Sakai, who has been a leader in the area over the last decade, and CASA San Antonio, have allowed faster and more efficient placement of foster youth into permanent families.

We will hear from all of our witnesses finally this afternoon, but specifically I share the concern that I believe Nicole Dobbins will be expressing about the lack of clarity regarding how the States use these award payments. I know that some States under budget pressures have tended to use the Federal money for perhaps what they had been doing previously, and I think it is important that our Federal resources add to, not supplant money that was already being invested on adoption activities. The inclusion of a maintenance-of-effort requirement as part of reauthorization could help us ensure that the dollars that are so precious here that we are expending are actually being used to improve and strengthen child welfare.

I welcome the opportunity to discuss how we can continue to increase adoptions for children in foster care, but I do think one step that is important is to avoid any cuts in these modest, federally-funded adoption initiatives that will occur within just a few days under the sequester. Cutting funding for this program could mean less funding for postadoption services for families that have adopted a foster child, or less funding to recruit adoptive homes through online adoption exchanges and promotional materials, or less support for training adoption workers.

Another issue that requires our attention this year is the more recent Family Connection grants initiative. It is also scheduled to expire at the end of September. It has provided \$15 million each year in grants for State agencies and community organizations. It has been a more narrow program, but it is designed to connect or reconnect children with their biological relatives when it is safe and appropriate to do so. This small program, fairly new, created only in 2008, is currently being evaluated, but it looks like a program, from the preliminary review that I have seen, that could be effective in improving the lives of at-risk children.

I look forward to hearing from today's witnesses and working with our colleagues to continue to improve the well-being of all children in foster care.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman REICHERT. Thank you, Mr. Doggett.

I want to remind our witnesses to limit their oral testimony to 5 minutes. However, without objection, all of the written testimony will be made part of the permanent record.

On our panel this afternoon we will be hearing from Rita Soronen, the President and Chief Executive Officer of the Dave

Thomas Foundation for Adoption; Kelly Rosati, Vice President of Community Outreach, Focus on the Family; Pat O'Brien, Founder and Executive Director, You Gotta Believe! The Older Child Adoption & Permanency Movement, Incorporated; and Nicole Dobbins, Executive Director, Voice for Adoption.

Ms. Soronen, you are recognized.

STATEMENT OF RITA L. SORONEN, PRESIDENT AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, DAVE THOMAS FOUNDATION FOR ADOPTION

Ms. SORONEN. Thank you, Chairman and Members of the Committee. I am Rita Soronen, President and CEO of the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption. I am honored to be with you today.

I would like to start with a short video before I make my comments, and I think that is cued to run.

[Video shown.]

Sometimes a video can say it all, but I will try to sum it up in a few words as well.

You all know, and thank you for your comments, that children come into the child welfare system through no fault of their own. They are victims of traumatic abuse and neglect, and when they are permanently freed for adoption, our promise to them is that we will find them a family. Last year in this country, we negligently failed to live up to our promise of a family for more than 26,000 children who aged out of care.

This child-focused recruitment model, or Wendy's Wonderful Kids, that was developed, tested, and, until 2012, privately funded by the foundation, proves that there is a family for every child. We started the program with 7 pilot sites in 2004 and now provide individual grant commitments to public and private agencies that support 169 adoption professionals in 49 States, the District of Columbia, and 4 provinces in Canada. We have served 8,800 children, 3,400 of whom have had a finalized adoption, and another 500 are in their preadoptive placement, and these numbers are even more compelling when we understand the children successfully served.

The average age of a child served through this program is 12. At the point of referral into Wendy's Wonderful Kids, 30 percent of these children had already experienced six or more placements, and 50 percent had been in care 4 years or more. Half of the children have at least one identified clinical disability, and one in five of these children have already had a failed or a disrupted adoption. Critically, prior to Wendy's Wonderful Kids, more than half of these children had experienced no adoption recruitment activities on their behalf, none.

Child-focused recruitment demands that rather than ignoring these children because of a perception of unadoptability, or casting a broad net of general recruitment, or funding public displays of children, experienced adoption professionals work a model that includes smaller caseloads of typically harder-to-place children, intensive contact with the child and others, extensive case file review, diligent search for families and expert adoption preparation, and we know this works at a cost-effective level.

For example, before the State of Ohio took our program to scale, their fiscal experts estimated our grant commitments of \$3 million

for seven Ohio recruiters had already saved nearly \$32 million for the State of Ohio. With a financial partnership that added 32 more recruiters focusing on youth, they anticipated savings of more than \$105,000,000.

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, no child has to age out of care, hoping to make it on their own in this complex world. We can and we must keep our promise of finding families for all of our children. I will welcome your comments at the end of the testimonies.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Soronen follows:]

**Testimony of
Rita L. Soronen
President & Chief Executive Officer
Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption**

**U.S. House Committee on Ways and Means, Subcommittee on Human Resources
Hearing on Increasing Adoptions from Foster Care and the Adoption Incentives Program
February 27, 2013**

Good afternoon Chairman Reichert, Ranking Member Doggett and the Members of the Subcommittee. I am honored to be here and grateful for the invitation to join the hearing today.

I am Rita Soronen, president and CEO of the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption. For just over 20 years, the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption has shared the Subcommittee's quest to elevate and dramatically improve the services we provide to abused, neglected, dependent and abandoned children for whom the government has assumed temporary, but, too frequently, long-term responsibility. Created in 1992 by Dave Thomas, who was adopted, the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption works to dramatically increase the number of adoptions of waiting children from the United States foster care system, while providing information, resources, media awareness tools and educational materials to potential adoptive parents, individuals and organizations, at no cost to the user. Additionally, as a national nonprofit public charity, we provide grants to public and private organizations in all 50 states and the District of Columbia to results-based agencies that aggressively and measurably move children out of foster care and into adoptive homes.

Each day, we work under the core beliefs that 1) every child deserves a safe, nurturing and permanent home, 2) no child should linger in foster care or turn 18 and leave care without the family promised when they were permanently severed from their family of origin and 3) every child, no matter the age, placement or circumstance is adoptable.

Thank you to the members of the Subcommittee for their commitment to review and assess existing policies and emerging best practices for vulnerable children and youth, with a vigilant eye on providing the most effective evidence-based services on their behalf. The Adoption Incentives program has provided critical Federal funding to help states focus on increasing older youth adoptions and making important family connections.

Although we are encouraged by an increasing national awareness about the needs of foster care youth¹ (and in particular about children waiting to be adopted), a decline in children entering

¹ Harris Interactive, *National Adoption Attitudes Survey*, commissioned by the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption, 2007.

care and greater numbers of children being adopted from foster care², we are gravely concerned about older youth waiting to be adopted.

The number of children waiting to be adopted from U.S. foster care has consistently exceeded the number of finalized adoptions in each year for which national data are available. While the overall numbers of adoptions increased in the years following the 1998 implementation of the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA), the growth in adoptions of younger children has outpaced those of older children. At the same time, the numbers of older youth aging out of foster care continue to rise. In 1998, approximately 17,300 youth were emancipated from care, compared with more than 26,000 in 2011. Additionally, most recent data shows a current placement of more than 22,000 children in long-term foster care (or Planned Permanent Living Arrangement); these youth most likely will leave the system without defined permanency.³

Since these youth have typically spent the longest periods of time in care, the core issues of the abuse or neglect which they have experienced, combined frequently with exposure to family violence, substance abuse or lack of appropriate basic care, are exacerbated by frequent moves while in care, potential separation from siblings, multiple school or educational placements, and frequent turnover of social workers or other system contacts in their lives. The children most at risk of aging out and moving into society without the safety net of a family and a home, the youth who suffer the consequences of the government's broken promise of a family⁴, are the children for whom the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption has dedicated its energy, expertise and resources.

Strategies for recruiting and matching adoptive families for these children have a history of anecdotal rather than evidence-based development. Cataloging children online or through the media is common practice and supported by Federal funding, but there is scant evidence to suggest it is an effective method for effectively recruiting appropriate families for America's longest-waiting children who have individualized and often therapeutic or clinical needs. General recruitment practices through media campaigns help to make citizens more aware of the numbers of children in foster care, but cannot focus on the intense and urgent needs of children currently waiting for families.

Additionally, we know that the current ages of children in foster care waiting to be adopted, as well as their ages at the time of entry into foster care, are correlates of their likelihood of adoption. Based on analyses of national data from the Adoption and Foster Care Reporting

² U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, The AFCARS Report: Preliminary FY 2011 Estimates as of July 2012 (19).

³ Ibid.

⁴ For a review, see: Wertheimer, Richard. (2002). Youth who age out of foster care: Troubled lives, troubling prospects. Child Trends Research Brief #2002-59. Retrieved from http://www.childtrends.org/Files/Child_Trends2002_12_01_RB_FosterCare.pdf September 15, 2011.

System (AFCARS), Dr. Maza (2002) found that a waiting child's age is the most crucial characteristic affecting his or her likelihood of being adopted, and that the tipping point occurs between ages 8 and 9, after when a child is more likely to continue to wait and subsequently age out of foster care than to be adopted.⁵ Her more recent analyses have shown that, despite the 1997 Adoption and Safe Families Act's intention to promote the adoption of children waiting in foster care – particularly those who are older – the share of waiting children who are over age 8 has grown in the past decade. Further, while the time children spend waiting has declined markedly, this decline occurred solely for children who entered care prior to age 8.⁶ The inference that ASFA has not affected the adoption of older children highlights the critical need for innovative adoption recruitment programs.

WENDY'S WONDERFUL KIDS CHILD-FOCUSED RECRUITMENT MODEL AND MANAGEMENT

In response, the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption has dedicated significant private, and recently public, resources to develop, implement and grow a national model of child-focused recruitment (Wendy's Wonderful Kids) combined with long-term rigorous experimental evaluation of the model. The primary target populations for this model include older youth, sibling groups, children with mental or physical challenges, and children in placements that have typically been considered difficult adoption platforms (group homes, therapeutic placements and institutions). The program has grown from seven pilot implementation sites in 2004 to now 161 fully-funded grants at public and private adoption agencies in 49 states and the District of Columbia. Additionally, the Foundation manages the activities of the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption-Canada in which there are eight fully-funded sites in four provinces.

The Foundation named the grant program Wendy's Wonderful Kids to honor the significant fundraising that occurs through Wendy's restaurants across the nation, encouraging customers, employees and partners to donate to the Foundation. In turn, we dedicate funds back to the communities in which the funds are raised to support a recruiter(s) who works for children waiting to be adopted, and in particular, those children nearly everyone else has forgotten.

To date, we have served 8,789 children and found potential adoptive matches for 5,790 of these children. While 503 of the children served are currently in pre-adoptive placements, 3,406 adoptions have been finalized. Significantly, more than half of the children for whom the recruiters provided active engagement had *no* prior recruitment activities.⁷ This is particularly compelling given that the average age of a child served through this program is almost 12, more than 30 percent of the children had already been in six or more placements (nine percent had experienced 10 or more placements), 50 percent had been in the system for more than four years

⁵ Maza, P. (2002). The age factor in adoption. *The Roundtable*, 16(1).

⁶ Maza, P. (2009). A new look at the role of ASFA and children's ages in adoption, *The Roundtable*, 23 (1).

⁷ Malm, K., Vandivere, S., Allen, T., DeVooght, K., Ellis, R., McKlinton, A., Smollar, J., Williams, E., & Zinn, A. (2011.) *Evaluation Report Summary: The Wendy's Wonderful Kids Initiative*. Child Trends, Washington: DC.

at the point of referral into the program, 48 percent have at least one identified disability, 43 percent are referred as part of sibling groups, 20 percent reside in group homes or institutions at the time of referral, and 21 percent had already experienced failed or disrupted adoptions.

Since 2004, the Foundation has invested \$53.8 million of private funding in the development and growth of Wendy's Wonderful Kids in the United States, and another \$3.4 million in Wendy's Wonderful Kids in Canada. Simple math shows that given the number of adoptions finalized and dollars invested to date, each adoption has "cost" just over \$16,000. Although untangling the actual costs of maintaining a child in care is a challenge, national averages point to maintenance and administrative costs of nearly \$26,000 per child per year.⁸

The Wendy's Wonderful Kids child-focused recruitment concept is simple. With grant funds from the Foundation, agencies hire full-time, experienced adoption professionals who dedicate 100 percent of their days to find families for the longest-waiting children in their communities. These professionals, known as Wendy's Wonderful Kids recruiters, employ the Foundation's child-focused recruitment model and work on caseloads of children the system has forgotten, ensuring they have the time and resources to give each the attention he or she needs.

The recruiters employ aggressive practices and proven tactics focused on finding the best home for a child through the starting points of familiar circles of family, friends and neighbors, and then reaching out to the communities in which they live. The Foundation commits to one-year, renewable grants that support the salary, benefits and a portion of time of a supervisor, and ask in return that the agency commit to implementing the child-focused recruitment model, provide employment support for the recruiter hired, manage a smaller but intensive caseload of 15-20 children, and participate in monthly data reporting to the Foundation, as well as ongoing evaluation of process and results.

Critical to this relationship is the transition from passive recruitment for older and more difficult to place youth, to an aggressive and accountable method of finding families for children. The child-focused recruitment strategy is based on a specific dynamic recruitment plan tailored for the individual child and based on his or her unique circumstances, challenges, desires and needs and includes, but is not limited to, the following key components:

Relationship with Child: Recruiters must meet and communicate with the child regularly to develop trust and openness. This relationship is essential to building an effective recruitment plan. Prior to the implementation of this model, adoption professionals frequently told us they never met with the children for whom they were recruiting families.

⁸ Zill, N., Roseman, E. (2011). Better Prospects, Lower Cost: The Case for Increasing Foster Care Adoption. *Adoption Advocate No. 3*, National Council for Adoption.

Case Record Review: Recruiters must have access to, and conduct an in-depth review of, the existing case file, as well as ongoing review of relevant documents, reports and materials. An exhaustive case record review includes identification of all significant people in the child's life – past and present, including potential adoptive parents – while creating an understanding of the chronology of events, services, placements, educational and medical circumstances, and child welfare entry circumstances that the youth has experienced.

Network Building: Recruiters must meet with significant adults identified in the case record review (foster parents, CASA/GALs, counselors, teachers, extended family, etc.) and maintain regular and ongoing contact. Regular contact with individuals close to and knowledgeable about the child facilitates effective recruitment and matching.

Child Assessment and Adoption Preparation: Recruiters determine the child's strengths, challenges, desires, preparedness for adoption and whether the child has needs that should be addressed before moving forward with the adoption process. They must also assure that the child is prepared for adoption and during the matching process that the family is adequately prepared to meet the needs of the child.

Diligent Search: Recruiters conduct a diligent search of potential adoptive families, including family members, and identified connections to additional resources and pursue aggressive follow-up with contacts, with the knowledge and approval of the child's caseworker.

Recruitment Plan: Based on the file review, interviews with significant adults, assessment of and input from the child, recruiters develop and implement a comprehensive recruitment plan. The plan for each child is customized and defined by the child's needs, reviewed regularly, and updated quarterly.

The Foundation grants management and program teams provide orientation to and training of the child-focused model; communicate monthly, at a minimum, with the recruiters to discuss casework, challenges and to provide support; and make annual on-site visits with the grantees to assess fidelity to the model, review activities and meet with system representatives. Additionally, the grantee organizations provide regular financial, goal accountability and narrative reporting to the Foundation. Monthly, they must also input comprehensive data about their casework and the children on their caseloads into a database that is owned by the Foundation and managed by Washington, D.C.-based Child Trends.

CHILD-FOCUSED RECRUITMENT EVALUATION

The Wendy's Wonderful Kids strategy is to focus exhaustively on an individual child's history, experiences and needs and then make an aggressive and unrelenting effort on behalf of the child in order to find an appropriate adoptive family. At one level, the powerful individual success stories early into the program showed that the model appeared to be working; however, the

Foundation was keenly aware that no long-term evaluation of any recruitment model existed. It was critical to ensure that evidence-based activities and not an anecdotal approach drove these successful adoptions.

In 2005, the Foundation commissioned Child Trends for an unprecedented five-year evaluation of the child-focused model. *It is the most comprehensive, rigorous empirical evaluation of adoption recruitment practices completed to date in this country.* The research included both impact and process evaluations, and assessed the outcomes of randomly selected children served in 21 grantee agencies, representing 18 states, against a control group of children receiving traditional adoption recruitment methods in the same localities.

Significantly, the impact evaluation showed that children served by the child-focused Wendy's Wonderful Kids model are **1.7 times more likely to be adopted** than those not served by the program.⁹ Furthermore, its impact on adoption is strongest among older youth and those with mental health disorders – groups that have traditionally waited the longest for adoption, or that are least likely to achieve adoption – those groups are up to **three times more likely to be adopted**. Additionally, the process evaluation highlighted tactics of the model that worked to encourage successful adoptions. For example, in interviews with children served, those youth who were previously opposed to adoption (and therefore those most likely to be placed on the emancipation track for aging out of care, or moved to a court-ordered Planned Permanent Living Arrangement) were significantly more likely to feel open to adoption after working with a recruiter.

One sample of a narrative sent by a recruiter in Florida exemplifies the daily success of this program:

At age 16, Dana had been in foster care for eight years, and had lived in 22 different foster care placements. He seemed resigned to figuring out how to live on his own. Dana's future changed when he was added to the caseload. I found the name of an aunt who had expressed interest in adopting Dana in the past and discovered the initial barrier to adoption had simply been inadequate housing and the agency stopped using her as a potential adoptive resource. We worked with the housing authority, helped her to complete training, finalized a second home study, and helped her to navigate the interstate child welfare rules. I am excited to report Dana was adopted yesterday, just weeks before his 18th birthday.

SCALING THE MODEL AND COST IMPLICATIONS

With the release of the national evaluation of Wendy's Wonderful Kids, the Foundation put in place a strategic blueprint to scale the program within states, while partnering with the Annie E. Casey Foundation to develop a formal child-focused recruitment curriculum, as a companion to scaling activities. Additionally, we hosted a convening of cross-discipline experts and leaders

⁹ Ibid.

(pediatric, policy, funding, higher education, child welfare, media and public relations) to advise the Foundation on scaling, funding and policy implications of the research.¹⁰

In approaching our home state of Ohio, we made the case that if we were to be successful across the nation we, like our colleagues in adoption, needed to focus first in our own community. After sharing the national and local results and the evaluation findings with the leadership of the Ohio Department of Job & Family Services (ODJFS), the state committed to the resources necessary to scale Wendy's Wonderful Kids from seven existing Ohio sites to 41, serving a majority of Ohio's 88 counties and focusing on children age 9 or older and in care for two or more years. The Foundation committed to managing the increased grant sites in the way that had already proved successful in Ohio and across the nation.

In just six months and with the determined support of the administrative, program, and fiscal teams of the Ohio Department of Job & Family Services, 32 new recruiters have been hired, trained, and have growing caseloads, now at nearly 200 children. Sixteen children have already been matched with families, two are in pre-adoptive placements and a sibling group of three was just adopted last week. The director of the public agency that finalized those adoptions said:

Through the Wendy's Wonderful Kids program, Allen County Children Services has been able to hire two highly qualified and experienced children services social workers as our specialized adoption recruiters. They work with a reduced, yet intensive caseload to achieve the goal of securing forever families for our harder-to-adopt children and sibling groups. We would not have this ability without the support of the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption and the Ohio Department of Job & Family Services.

Keenly aware, though, that cost implications can frequently trump best practice, we worked with the fiscal team at ODJFS to quantify the return on its investment in this program and to use the partnership as a template for other states.

For example, prior to the state's investment in scaling, the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption, from 2005 – 2012, invested just over \$3 million in private funding in seven Ohio sites. During that time, we saw the finalization of 197 adoptions of children with an average age of 12.1 years. Given what we know about the likelihood of this population of children who are at risk for aging out of care, and calculating an annual savings of \$27,480 per child (Ohio-specific figures) by getting them adopted, and while factoring in the average monthly subsidy provided to families, Wendy's Wonderful Kids saved the state of Ohio nearly \$32 million.¹¹

¹⁰ Gallagher & Associates (2012), *20th Anniversary Distinguished Panel of Experts: Recommendations to Scale the Wendy's Wonderful Kids Model*.

¹¹ ODJFS, Dan Shook, Bureau of Fiscal Accountability, 12/12.

Expanding those calculations to include a current \$2 million investment from the state for the scaled counties in 2013, ODJFS calculates that over three years (with additional annual commitments), and with the finalization of 650 adoptions based on historical success, the state of **Ohio will save in excess of \$105 million by the end of 2015.**

Of course, these numbers represent actual hard cost savings. When we combine that with the frequently researched costs to society of not getting these children adopted, there can be no argument that both the human and the fiscal realities can no longer to be ignored.¹²

CONTINUING CHALLENGES AND HOPE

There is no more important work in this country than assuring the safety and well-being of our most vulnerable citizens – children who, through no fault of their own, are in the child welfare system waiting for permanent families. There is equally no more important promise to be kept than the one we make to our children when they have been permanently removed from their families of origin – that we will cherish their childhood, keep them safe, and find each one a family with whom they can grow and thrive. **Last year we broke that promise to 26,286 children who we negligently allowed to age out of care.**

Even with the clear human, partnership, and financial success of Wendy's Wonderful Kids, there remain challenges to address. Too many of the very adults charged with finding adoptive families for youth still believe that some children are simply too old, too damaged or too set in their ways to be adopted. Indeed, even the general population is skeptical of these children. In a Harris Interactive national survey of attitudes toward foster care adoption that the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption will be releasing this spring, only half of Americans believe that every child is adoptable.

At the Foundation, we continue to work to train professionals, potential adoptive parents, policymakers and the general public that no child is "unadoptable" and that we have an evidence-based model to support that belief. We have also created an award-winning national "I Am" print and broadcast media awareness campaign ("*I am not too old, I am not unlovable, I am not a troublemaker, We are not twice the burden*") that works to eradicate the "unadoptable" notion. This month, we will release a follow-up campaign that focuses on families who have adopted older youth ("*Having a son has been an amazing life-changing experience: we met ours when he was 16*") that works to normalize the adoptions of older youth and elevate our attitudes toward their potential.

¹² The Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative estimated that "the outcome differences between youth aging out of the foster and the general population is nearly \$5,700,000,000 for each annual cohort of youth leaving care". Cutler Consulting (2009). *Cost Avoidance: Bolstering the Economic Case for Investing in Youth Aging Out of Care*. Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative.

As we continue to work and scale this program across the nation, our recruiters are too often challenged by a lack of access to critical records, too few competent post-adoption services and professionals for their families, confusion and conflicting information about available health and educational resources, burdensome interstate regulations, and an incomprehensible willingness of the custodial agencies and courts to place children in permanent uncertainty, rather than moving them toward adoption.

We fervently believe that the evidence-based model of child-focused recruitment, our success at forming national public/private partnerships for children, and the promising example the state of Ohio has offered to the nation generates hope for our children and the systems that surround them. It also supports shifting resources to save scarce dollars to provide well-trained and managed workers to make life-changing efforts for youth, and refutes the practice of placing tens of thousands of children in the intolerable limbo of independence without family, Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement without accountable review, or the purgatory of unadoptability.

Dave Thomas reminded us daily that “these children are not someone else’s responsibility, they are our responsibility.” And we would simply add *unadoptable is no longer acceptable*. We stand ready to continue to work with policymakers, practitioners, funders and families to assure a safe, nurturing and permanent family for every child waiting to be adopted. Not for just some of the children, but for all of the children.

Thank you for the opportunity to be with you today and for your careful review of the Adoption Incentives program and its continuing positive impact on the very children who need our best and most generous efforts.

Respectfully submitted,



Rita L. Soronen
President & CEO



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Chairman REICHERT. Thank you for your testimony.
Ms. Rosati, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

**STATEMENT OF KELLY ROSATI, J.D., VICE PRESIDENT OF
COMMUNITY OUTREACH, FOCUS ON THE FAMILY**

Ms. ROSATI. Thank you, Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee. It is an honor to be here. I am very grateful that this is the subject of your hearing today, and it is a privilege to be able to be a part of it.

My name is Kelly Rosati, as you said, and I am the Vice President of Community Outreach at Focus on the Family, and as a part of our community outreach, Wait No More, our event to focus on foster care adoption recruitment, is a cornerstone of our work.

Focus on the Family is a donor-supported, global Christian ministry that reaches about 238 million people in 130 countries, and as I said, we are very passionate about foster care adoption. Our President, Jim Daly, was, in fact, orphaned as a child and lived in the foster care system, and so part of that experience has been what fuels his passion for this.

I am blessed. My husband and I are parents to four children, who came to us through the blessing of foster care adoption, three of whom have special needs, the kind that are the subject of the children who are still waiting for families.

Wait No More began in 2008, and the idea was that we would use the voice and the reach of Focus on the Family to try to increase awareness about the needs of kids that are in foster care that need families, just like we saw in that video, and the idea was that we would partner with local child welfare officials, adoption agencies, church and ministry leaders in a given community to try to work collaboratively to raise awareness and help recruit families for these kids.

Since 2008, we have had 15 Wait No More events in 12 States, and we have had some very encouraging outcomes. We have seen 8,300 attendees at our events, representing 4,700 families. We have worked with 200 county, State, private agencies and ministries all across the United States, and those folks that have attended have represented 2,100 different churches in communities across the country.

The best news of all, though, is that at the end of the day at these events, we have seen more than 2,100 families who have begun the process of foster care adoption. They are beginning this process with a full understanding of the challenges that they are about to encounter.

Frankly, one of the things that we do at our events is that we give the attendees the opportunity to hear perspectives from adoptive parents, to hear the perspective from young adults who were adopted as teenagers or as a part of sibling groups. We give them the opportunity to hear from social workers about what the process is going to be like and what some of the barriers may be. And, frankly, we talk an awful lot and almost, you could say, try to talk them out of it in a way, because we want them to be very serious that this is about the needs of the child. And again, as you saw in the great messaging on the video, it is about the needs of the child, not the wants and desires of the adults.

We are talking specifically about teenagers, sibling groups, and kids with special needs, and so that is why we are encouraged that knowing all of that, knowing some of the barriers and the challenges, including the specific behaviors that they may encounter, and why they may encounter those behaviors, and what strategies might be effective in helping that child, after all of that we have seen more than 2,000 families that have begun the process of foster care adoption.

We are very passionate and committed to postadoption support. We want to have integrity in recruiting these families for our kids, and we want to also be there for them after the fact, when they encounter difficulties, and so as a part of that commitment, we have spent an equal amount of money on complementary post-adoption support for families. We have provided about 50,000 units of resources that are designed to be adoption competent to meet the needs of the families. We have trained 200 counselors across the country in partnership with Texas Christian University's Institute on Child Development; we have helped train them to have a greater adoption competency. We underwrite the training, we pay for it, but we say to them in return, we ask that you would provide counseling to a family at no cost to the family so that we can increase access to the kind of help our families need.

We have a 1-800 hotline that families are able to call. Actually it is a warm line where they can receive free counseling and also referrals then to adoption-competent counselors in their areas.

Finally, I would like to say, as you think about barriers to adoption and to increasing foster care adoption, one thing to be mindful of, I suppose, is the fact that I think we have perverse disincentives built into the system. So right now if you are a teenager in foster care, you may have access to certain benefits, including mental health services and postsecondary education, if you stay in foster care, but if you choose a family, you don't have access to those same benefits, and we don't believe that children should have to choose between those things.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Rosati follows:]

**Testimony before the Congressional Subcommittee on Human Resources of the
Committee on Ways and Means
February 27, 2013**

**Kelly Rosati, J.D.
Vice President, Community Outreach
Focus on the Family
8605 Explorer Dr., Colorado Springs, CO 80920**

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, thank you for inviting my testimony before you this afternoon. Please allow me to introduce myself and my organization. My name is Kelly Rosati, and I am the Vice President of Community Outreach at Focus on the Family. I am also blessed, along with my husband, to have adopted our four children from the foster care system, and three of them have special needs. One of my roles at Focus on the Family is to oversee our Adoption and Orphan Care Initiative.

Focus on the Family is a donor-supported global Christian ministry that reaches about 238 million people in 130 countries. We help families thrive by providing help and resources for strengthening believers in their faith and sharing the gospel; building resilient marriages that reflect God's design; equipping parents to raise their children with a thriving faith; advocating for the preborn, orphaned and life at every stage; and engaging the culture through a biblical worldview. Visit Focus online at FocusOnTheFamily.com.

I: The Current State of the US Foster Care System

One of our nation's most intractable child-advocacy issues is the tragedy of children and youth trapped in foster care awaiting adoptive families to call their own. The children in this situation are often viewed by society as "un-adoptable" because of their age, minority status, or special need. At Focus on the Family, we reject such thinking and believe that every waiting child deserves a family. We are committed to using our voice and reach within the Christian community to recruit adoptive families for these waiting children.

We have also discovered through our national collaborative efforts with other adoption-focused organizations, including Show Hope (Christian musician Steven Curtis Chapman's organization), Hope for Orphans (a ministry of FamilyLife), and the Christian Alliance for Orphans, that despite the fact that more than 100,000 children in the United States are waiting in foster care for adoptive families¹, very few faith-based organizations and leaders of the community have focused their primary attention on recruiting adoptive families for these waiting children and youth (also considered "legal orphans" as their birth parents' rights have been terminated).

Focus on the Family's desire is to fill this significant awareness gap by calling attention to the plight of the most difficult to place and longest waiting legal orphans in the United States. Some of the reasons that these children are at increased risk are:

- Most of these children started life with abuse, neglect, or abandonment.
- Their birth parents' legal parental rights had to be terminated in order to keep them safe and provide them a chance at a happy life.

¹ AFCARS Report #19, July 2012, page 1. <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/cb/afcarsreport19.pdf>

- Their only legal, permanent “parent” is the government entity (state or county) that has permanent legal custody of them.

These children live in temporary foster homes, move frequently from home to home, and have no permanency in their lives. Unless they are adopted, they will exit or “age-out” of the system at age 18 and may become adults who belong nowhere and have no permanent personal relationship connection with anyone.

In 2011, the most current year for which data is available, family courts across the country terminated more than 61,361 children’s birth parents’ legal parental rights, while only 50,516 children were adopted from the foster care system.² In fiscal year 2011, more than 26,000 children exited³ the foster care system, many of whom face a bleak future. Of the youth who aged-out of the foster care system without permanent connections, statistics show that:

- Almost 20 percent of foster care alumni who aged out did not have a high school diploma or GED.⁴
- Only 8 percent had a postsecondary degree from either a 2- or 4-year school.⁵
- 81 percent of male former foster youth and 59 percent of female former foster youth were arrested by age 23 or 24.⁶
- Nearly one third of girls formerly in care had been pregnant by age 18⁷
- 68 percent of girls and 42 percent of boys had been food stamp recipients.⁸
- Over half of youth who aged out of foster care experienced one or more episodes of homelessness.⁹

Without the stability and comfort of a permanent family, many youth suffer dire consequences.

II: The Emphasis of our Involvement with Child Welfare

At Focus on the Family, we believe that every child deserves a permanent family. For too long, children and youth in foster care have been overlooked and forgotten. Right now, more than 100,000 legal orphans in the U.S. foster care system are waiting for adoptive families to call their own. As we looked at the need, we found that it was not because of a lack of agency capacity or competency that these children and youth are waiting. Rather, a lack of adoptive families causes them to wait. Therefore, our primary objective is to raise awareness of and recruit families for waiting kids in foster care.

The combination of our deeply held convictions coupled with the fact that there are more than 300,000 churches in the United States leads us to believe that by mobilizing the thousands of faith communities

² AFCARS Report #19, July 2012, page 1. <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/cb/afcarsreport19.pdf>

³ AFCARS Report #19, July 2012, page 3. <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/cb/afcarsreport19.pdf>

⁴ Mark Courtney, Amy Dworsky, Gretchen Cusick, Judy Havlicek, Alfred Perez, Tom Keller, “Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth: Outcomes at Age 21.” *Chapin Hall Center for Children*, University of Chicago, (December 2007): 20.

⁵ Ibid., 20.

⁶ Ibid., 93.

⁷ Ibid., 74.

⁸ Ibid., 43-44.

⁹ Peter Pecora, Ronald Kessler, Jason Williams, Kirk O’Brien, Chris Downs, Diana English, James White, Eva Hiripi, Catherine White, Tamera Wiggins, & Kate Holmes, “Improving Foster Family Care: Findings from the Northwest Foster Care Alumni Study.” *Casey Family Programs*, (2005).

around the country, we will see a reduction in the number of waiting children throughout our foster care system. In some communities, this has already proven true.

In order to accomplish this, we launched *Wait No More: Finding Families for Waiting Kids* events. We collaborate with government officials (state and county), adoption agencies, church leaders and ministry partners to host half-day events. Through the event and robust, targeted media campaigns, *Wait No More* is highlighting the urgent need for adoptive parents.

At the *Wait No More* event, attendees have the opportunity to hear different perspectives on adoption from foster care from adoptive parents, adopted youth, siblings, and social workers. We do not sugarcoat the difficulties inherent in the process. To the contrary, we spend time explaining the common behavioral challenges, the reasons behind such challenges, and strategies for successful child and family outcomes.

In addition, on the day of the event, adoption agencies and support ministries are on site to answer questions and help families take the next step in the process. Most importantly, families have the opportunity to start the process of adoption from foster care before they leave the event. Families are able to choose an agency they prefer to work with, and those who do not choose an agency on that day are matched with agencies based on criteria such as agency service area and capacity. We coordinate with the agencies after the event regarding those families, and they typically receive a call from the agency within 3 business days of the event.

III: Program Outcomes

To date, through 15 events and three online campaigns, more than 2,100 families have started the process of adoption from foster care through the collaborative efforts of *Wait No More*. Additional events are planned around the country in the hopes that children and youth in foster care will *Wait No More* for the forever families they deserve.

Here in Colorado, we have invested heavily in recruitment efforts in order to see the number of waiting kids reduced. In 2008 when we hosted our first event, more than 800 children and youth were awaiting permanent families. As a result of both the *Wait No More* efforts and the ongoing work of excellent agencies and ministries throughout the state, that number is down to about 270 waiting kids. (To read an article on the reduction in the number of waiting kids in Colorado, please see Appendix A.)

Any group working independently cannot achieve results such as these. However, through greater collaboration between child welfare, licensed child placing agencies, and churches, the results are multiplied. Through 15 events to date in twelve different states, more than 8,300 people have attended an event representing 4,500 families and 2,100 churches. As stated previously, more than 2,100 families have started the process of adoption from foster care, which is slightly more than 40 percent of families in attendance.

In May of 2011, the Gillett family attended a Wait No More event in Michigan. Here is their story:

We have now adopted twin boys. The adoption was finalized on June 20, 2012, just five days before their 16th birthdays. They had been in the system about four years and had given up hope. We have had many struggles along the way, but God in his grace sees us through the rough roads we've traveled. After 12 years of being empty nesters, we have had to make big adjustments. It's been both the hardest and the most rewarding thing

we've ever done. I wish more people would adopt a child who only wants to know someone cares! I love our boys! We are blessed!

Similarly, the Savoca family attended an event in Florida:

We considered all the different ways to adopt and chose adoption from foster care primarily because of our church adoption ministry and *Wait No More*. After attending the *Wait No More* conference in Fort Lauderdale, Florida and hearing Tiffany Jorgenson's story about being adopted at the age of 11, we felt led to consider adopting an older child and prayed about it for several months. We eventually connected with 10-year-old Carlos who liked pizza and enjoyed quoting movie lines. We continued to pray for God's guidance and wisdom, even as we encountered some difficult setbacks. The transition period was long and often difficult but we are encouraged because we see him blossoming into a wonderful young man. We are also rejoicing because Carlos recently accepted the Lord as his Savior! We are very blessed with Carlos and know the Lord is going to do mighty things in our son's life!

Stories such as these are the impetus behind the work that we do. Included in Appendix B is a brief overview of the *Wait No More* event hosted in September 2011 at Overlake Christian Church in Washington State.

IV: Crucial Factors Contributing to the Success of *Wait No More*

When considering in what locations we will host events, several criteria are used to help determine the feasibility of a successful event in a given area. Criteria include:

- Support from local county and/or state government
- Private and/or public child placing organizations with state contracts to place children and the capacity to handle additional families
- Area churches willing to serve as host as well as additional churches willing to promote the event within their congregations
- Funding secured through Focus on the Family

County and/or State Government Support

Having done events in 12 different states, we have yet to encounter a negative reaction from the state or county government. While they may have initial concerns about how the event will work, how families will be served, and how much capacity their staff and contracted partners have, we have been able to overcome those questions and work collaboratively towards a successful event. We have found state commissioners, directors, and caseworkers overall enthusiastic about additional efforts to find families for waiting kids. Our goal is simply to enhance the success of the work being done day in and day out.

Private and/or Public Child Placing Agency Capacity

While we know families will more than likely hit some roadblocks throughout the process of adoption, our hope is that this first step in starting the process will not be the first roadblock. With an average of 122 families starting the process at each event, it is important to ensure that public and private agencies combine to have enough capacity to handle the influx of families. This has, at times, prevented us from moving forward in certain locations. Recruiting adoptive families for waiting kids in foster care is a difficult endeavor. We want to do all we can to make the process as smooth as it should be. On the other hand, we discuss the importance of the process – with all its frustrations – in preparing families for the monumental task of welcoming home a waiting child or youth.

Church Involvement

The selection of the right host church can be complex. It is important to have a venue large enough to handle the event, positive name recognition, easy access for attendees unfamiliar with the area, and support from senior church leadership. It is also crucial to engage other local pastors and lay leaders in promotion of the event.

Marketing

The bulk of our costs are spent marketing the event, primarily to our Focus on the Family constituency. In order to best leverage Focus on the Family's influence, we focus our efforts through faith-based media channels including traditional radio, print and social media. We also distribute church-based promotional materials including video, bulletin inserts, flyers, and posters. We host a lunch six to eight weeks before the Wait No More event with pastors and faith-based leaders in order to cast the vision for the event, provide materials, and secure promotion commitments.

Event Funding

One of the first questions of concern to child welfare officials, private agencies, and other ministries is the cost to implement an event like this. Each *Wait No More* event is completely underwritten by the generosity of Focus on the Family donors. No agency or ministry is charged to participate nor is any family charged to attend. However, we do realize there are some costs associated with licensing families or pursuing adoption that are the responsibility of each party.

Once a determination can be made on the strength of the above criteria, we move forward with collaborative planning and marketing of the event.

V: Outside Endorsements for *Wait No More*

Since the inception of *Wait No More*, many have commented on the effectiveness of the program. Below are a few things of note:

- Recognition at the White House observance of National Adoption Month in Washington, D.C. on November 28, 2011
- The Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute (CCAI) briefing in May 2010 highlighted successful models of foster and adoptive parent recruitment for federal legislators and staff
- Recognition by the National Council for Adoption in "Engaging the Private Sector to Increase Positive Permanency Outcomes for Children in Foster Care" in September 2011
- Participation in a private gathering with leading adoption advocate US Senator Mary Landrieu in December 2011
- Invitation to the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives Community forum in Denver in July 2011
- From the Denver Post: "It was phenomenal. It's never happened before that we had faith-based groups, county governments, the state and other agencies in one place at one time," [Dr. Sharen] Ford said. "People Care about Colorado's kids."¹⁰
- From the Wall Street Journal: "Yet it is the efforts of Focus on the Family...that have produced the most striking results so far. The group announced...that it would be devoting a considerable amount of its resources to a new initiative called Wait No More."¹¹

¹⁰ "Adoption effort gets 'phenomenal' results," The Denver Post, November 2008.
http://www.denverpost.com/breakingnews/cj_11075305

- The Heritage Foundation: "Wait No More has delivered unprecedented rates of success in finding families for waiting children...States should enthusiastically pursue opportunities for parent recruitment through faith-based communities."¹²

Thank you for your time today and for considering reauthorizing the Adoption Incentives Program. Please let us know if we can be of further assistance.

Kelly Rosati
Vice President, Community Outreach
Focus on the Family

¹¹ "Adoption season for evangelicals," The Wall Street Journal, September 2010.

<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748703743504575494263102089970.html>

¹² "Foster Care: Safety Net or Trap Door?" The Heritage Foundation, Thomas C. Atwood, pg. 14, March 2011.

Appendix A

Adoption initiative halves numbers of kids needing families

By Electa Draper
 The Denver Post
http://www.denverpost.com/news/ci_14516591

POSTED: 03/05/2010 01:00:00 AM MST

The number of Colorado children in foster care awaiting permanent adoption has been cut in half by a partnership between churches and government that places parentless kids in "forever homes."

When the Colorado Springs-based ministry Focus on the Family began spearheading the "Wait No More" adoption initiative in November 2008, the state had 8,000 children in foster care. That number included almost 800 children who were eligible for adoption because their parents had lost parental rights after the state found serious and repetitive neglect and abuse in their families.

In early 2010, only 365 children eligible for adoption remain in foster care, said Sharen Ford, manager of permanency services for the Colorado Department of Human Services.

The success of the initiative has surprised even its many partners — the state, nine counties, New Life Church in Colorado Springs, and dozens of other churches and private agencies. Ford called the results "phenomenal."

Last year alone, more than 1,000 adoptions became final, Ford said. Because children constantly enter and leave the system, the numbers are always in flux, but by the end of 2009, 6,287 were in foster care.

"I'm stunned by the number of kids we've moved off the waiting list," Focus on the Family president and chief executive Jim Daly said. "I

was one of those kids — a kid that doesn't have a mom and dad. I was never adopted, but I was very appreciative of the people who came along to mentor me."

Daly said orphan care is a core mission of Christianity.

"If my Bible math is right, God reminds us 47 times to take care of widows and orphans," Daly said. "This country has something like 300,000 churches and 130,000 orphans. The math is pretty simple."

The average age of a waiting child in Colorado is 11 to 12.

"We talk kids"

Daly said Ford and the state Human Services staff impressed him. "They care so much about the kids."

For her part, Ford said she considers it a remarkable public-private relationship.

"We don't talk religion. We don't talk politics," she said. "We talk kids."

Tiffany Beal, now a 20-year-old college senior in Colorado Springs, was in foster care for about three years before her adoption at age 11. She urges people to go out on a limb and adopt — because it's the best thing they can do for a child.

"The most amazing part of being adopted was that no matter what, I always had a home. I had someone to call Mom and Dad," Beal said. "Even at 3, my little brother knew he wasn't home in foster care. He kept asking me, 'When are we going to go home?'"

Prospective parents can hear about the challenges and rewards of adoption and then — if they choose — begin the long adoption process at "Wait No More" events.

Focus held such an event in Colorado Springs in November 2008. At one in October in Loveland, 50 families took the first steps to adopt children. The next is scheduled for September in Denver, where there are currently 116 children available for adoption.

Other participating counties are Adams, Arapahoe, Broomfield, Boulder, Larimer, El Paso, Jefferson and Pueblo.

Ford said the screening for adoptive families is extensive. Social workers attempt to match the needs of children — many of whom have experienced a great deal in their short lives — to families' capabilities. But the process is also inclusive, she says.

Colorado law allows for adoptive families to be two-parent, single-parent, older or otherwise nontraditional, including gay households.

"We try to screen people in," Ford said. "Everybody wants to have a forever home. And there are no such things as perfect families. We need families who are flexible — who have humor."

Room for four more

Bill, whose last name is being withheld to ensure his family's safety, last year adopted four siblings between the ages of 3 and 10. He and his wife already had four children.

His biggest anxiety was the sheer number of unknowns, from the kids' favorite foods to potential emotional triggers from past traumas.

"The most amazing thing is that they've been in our home less than a year, but it feels like it's been a lot longer — in a good way," Bill said, laughing. "From that first weekend, it felt as if it was meant to be. But that first weekend, there was a lot of explaining."

At Focus, the initiative is a national effort, said Kelly Rosati, senior director of the ministry's Sanctity of Life division.

In addition to the two adoption events in Colorado, Focus has held such meet-ups in St. Louis, Los Angeles and Fort Lauderdale, Fla. Of those attending, 830 families initiated the adoption process at the events. About 750 different churches have been involved.

"We are not giving up or stopping until every waiting child in Colorado has the family it deserves," Rosati said.

*Electa Draper: 303-954-1276
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Find out more

Don't want to wait until the next adoption event? Visit icareaboutorphans.org to learn about adopting kids from foster care.

Appendix B

Wait No More^(R).

 Finding Families for
 Waiting Kids

***Finding Families for Washington's
 Waiting Kids Results Overview***



- Hosted *Wait No More* at Overlake Christian Church on Saturday, September 24, 2011
- Approximately 630 people attended
- Those people represented more than 345 different families
- **Of those, 111 families initiated the process of adoption from foster care at the event;** this represents 32.0% of families in attendance
- 15 agencies and ministries were on site to answer participants' questions and help them start the process of adoption from foster care including:
 - A Family for Every Child Heart Gallery
 - Antioch Adoptions
 - Bethany Christian Services
 - City Ministries
 - Department of Social and Health Services of Washington
 - Olive Crest
 - Overlake Christian Church
 - Youth for Christ
- More than 160 different churches were represented at *Wait No More*
- All participating families received complimentary copies of Focus on the Family resources: *Handbook on Thriving as an Adoptive Family*, *Wait No More: One Family's Amazing Adoption Journey*, and "Wrapping Around Adoptive Families"

Chairman REICHERT. Thank you for your testimony.
Mr. O'Brien, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF PAT O'BRIEN, MS, LMSW, FOUNDER AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, YOU GOTTA BELIEVE! THE OLDER CHILD ADOPTION & PERMANENCY MOVEMENT, INCORPORATED

Mr. O'BRIEN. Thank you.

I am Pat O'Brien, founder and CEO of You Gotta Believe! The Older Child Adoption & Permanency Movement, an organization that first and foremost considers itself a homelessness prevention program. And the way we prevent homelessness is to find permanent parents for teens and young adults before they are discharged from the foster care system to no one but themselves.

When we started You Gotta Believe back in 1995, I noticed an interesting statistic when homeless populations were surveyed. In every survey we looked at, over half the homeless reported having grown up in foster care as youth. They had actually come into our system for their own safety and well-being, only to be placed in harm's way when they were discharged from the very same system.

I believe the sad result is the direct product of two primary barriers. The first barrier is simple: Lack of belief that we can find permanent parents for teens and young adults as they are aging out of foster care. This lack of belief keeps laws from being created that would mandate concurrent planning at the exit end of the system. My over 25 years of experience has taught me that our child welfare system must never stop recruiting permanent parents for children at any age that they are at risk of aging out to our Nation's streets.

The second barrier is actually a child welfare permanency planning goal referred to or called in the law Some Other Planned Permanent Living Arrangement which May Include a Residential Educational Program. Many in our field refer to this permanency planning goal as Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement, or APPLA.

APPLA is focused on preparing youth for adulthood. APPLA focuses on skills development and teaching youngsters the important skills to survive in the world on their own. And though skills development in preparing for adulthood is very important, there are still very few, if any, young people in the general population, including yours and my children who are over 21, making it on their own without the help of their parents.

For example, as you know, the overwhelming majority of 22-year-old college graduates who come from fairly well-off one- or two-parent families return home to their parents after they graduate college with a 4-year bachelor's degree.

But we, as a child welfare system, are putting youth between the ages of 18 and 21 in harm's way without even trying to get them permanent parents before they are discharged from our foster care system because there is no law that mandates even the effort.

So how do we find permanent parents for aging-out youth? You Gotta Believe has a three-pronged approach. The first we call the friend's approach. You see, once you believe that a permanent parent must be found for every youth before they age out of care, the first place you look for this permanent parent is by talking to the

constructive adults who are already in an individual young person's life. And when we identify someone who is known to the youth, we ask these folks to take a 10-week learning experience we call Adopting Older Kids and Youth, or A-OKAY, to see if making a lifetime commitment to this young person they so much care about is something that they can do.

Our statistics and research show us that this is the single most effective way to recruit a lifetime parent for youth aging out of care. During a 4-year period under a Federal adoption opportunities demonstration grant, it took nearly 1,000 prospective applicants from the general public to walk through our door to get 37 young people a parent. However, during the same 4-year period, it only took 154 prospective applicants to walk through our doors who knew a teen to get 83 young people placed in a lifetime family. This approach is a simple, highly efficient means of recruiting permanent parents for aging-out teens.

Our second approach is the acquaintances approach. There are many young people in the system where it is believed by the people around them that they have no constructive adults in their lives. For these youth we set up opportunities for them to share the same time and space with our prospective and certified families. We do this by bringing young people into our A-OKAY parent preparation classes as consultants to teach our prospective families what it is like to be a teen growing up in foster care.

Many families who come forward having no interest in adoptive teens have decided a teen on our panel was someone they could adopt. Dozens and dozens of youth have been placed as a direct result of sharing the same time and space and becoming acquaintances with the prospective and certified families who have taken our A-OKAY course. This is the second-best way.

The third approach is community education. Years ago our organization realized that we were having little success trying to sell what we were doing to the general public in 15- or 30-second sound bites. That is why we created our own media, both TV and radio. These broadcasts serve a local purpose of recruiting local parents and a more global purpose by inspiring the rest of the world by introducing them to the wonderful youth who need permanent families and the parents who adopt them, all in one-half hour thoughtful interviews and conversations.

Finally, where should adoption incentive rewards be reinvested? There are two equally important areas. The first is funding to continue to recruit the very permanent parents that we know are out there for each and every youth. Reinvesting these incentive dollars to utilize the three strategies noted above would be an impactful way to get more youth into permanent families before they are discharged from the foster care system.

Parents and families are the foundation and springboard to every child's future. Parents and families give youth access to the village we so often talk about needing to raise children. It sure does take a village to raise a child, but only if the child has a parent in that village to provide the foundation he or she needs. This is equally true for the 18-, 19-, 20- or 21-year-old as it is for the infant, toddler, latency-age, and tween-age child.

Second, we must support families after the youth move in. Almost all the youth at the age range we place had serious trauma in their lives. We prepare parents for what to expect, but we must also be there to support them during their hard times.

If we could provide these two basic adoption services, then each youth will have what the child welfare system promised them when they first came into foster care, and that promise was a home that provides safety, the opportunity for well-being, and a permanent parent and family who will be there for them long after their years in foster care are over.

I want to thank you very much for the time.

[The prepared statement of Mr. O'Brien follows:]



Testimony before

Human Resources Subcommittee - Committee on Ways and Means

Hearing on Adoption Incentives - Wednesday February 27th, 2013

There Is No Safety or Well-Being Without Permanent Parents At Exit End of the System

Hi there! I am Pat O'Brien, Founder and Current Executive Director of *You Gotta Believe! The Older Child Adoption & Permanency Movement, Inc* an organization that first and foremost considers itself a homelessness prevention program. The way we prevent homelessness is to find permanent parents for teens and young adults before they are discharged from the foster care system to no one but themselves.

I want to thank you so much for allowing me to testify on behalf of *You Gotta Believe* before the Human Resources Subcommittee of the Committee on Ways and Means as you are addressing the very important topic of increasing adoptions from foster care through the Adoption Incentives program.

When I started *You Gotta Believe* back in 1995 I noticed an interesting statistic when homeless populations were surveyed. In every survey I looked at, over half the homeless reported having grown up in foster care as youth. They had actually come into our system first and foremost for their own safety and well-being only to be placed in harm's way when they were discharged from the very same system. I believe this sad result is the direct product of two primary barriers.

TWO PRIMARY BARRIERS:

The first barrier is simple: Lack of belief that we can find permanent parents for teens and young adults as they are aging out of foster care. This "lack of" belief keeps laws from being created that would mandate concurrent planning at the exit end of the system. My over 25 years of experience has taught me that our child welfare system must never stop recruiting permanent parents for children of any age that are at risk of aging out to our nation's streets.

And this leads to the second barrier: A Child Welfare Permanency Planning Goal call: Some Other Planned Permanent Living Arrangement Which May Include a Residential Education Program (SOPPLA-WMI- A-REP.) Many in our field refer to this permanency planning goal as Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement or simply APPLA.

APPLA is focused on preparing youth for adulthood. APPLA focuses on skills development and teaching youngsters the important skills to survive in the world on their own. And though skills development and preparing for adulthood is very important, there are still very few, if any, youth in the general population (including yours and my children over the age of 21) making it on their own without the help of their parents.

For example, did you know that the overwhelming majority of 22 year old college graduates who comes from fairly well-off one or two-parent families return home to their parents after they graduate from college with a four year bachelor's degree?

Also, did you know that according to the US Census the average age a youth leaves home in the United States of America is 26?

But we, as a child welfare system, are putting youth between the ages of 18 and 21 in harm's way without even trying to get them permanent parents before they are discharged from our foster care system because there is no law that mandates even the effort.

SO HOW DO WE FIND PERMANENT PARENTS FOR AGING OUT YOUTH:

If our law makers ever decide to have concurrent planning at the exit end of the system whereby we not only prepare youth for adulthood by teaching them independent living skills, but we also simultaneously mandate the recruitment of permanent parents for them as well, *You Gotta Believe* can be very helpful in showing the world how relatively easy it is to find those permanent parents for our aging out youth. *You Gotta Believe* utilizes a three prong approach to finding lifetime parents for aging out youth that we call our *Saving F.A.C.E {Friends, Acquaintances, and Community Education} Approach to Finding Permanent Parents for Youth --- Barring No One*.

1) The Friend's Approach:

You see, once we believe that a permanent parent must be found for every youth before they age out of the foster care system, and we legally mandate that effort, the first place we look for this permanent parent is talking to the constructive adults who are already in an individual youth's life. People such as:

Social Workers; Employers and co-worker; Facebook "Friends"; Coaches or Other Extracurricular people; Former babysitters; Former Foster Parents and/or former foster parents neighbors, friends, and family members; Unexplored Maternal and/or Paternal relatives; People re-met at family Funerals; Child Care Staff; Administrative Staff; School Teachers & Other School Personnel; Therapists; Volunteers & Mentor; AWOL Resources; God Parents; and parents of best friends, co-workers, & teammates (This is a just a partial list of lifetime parents we have found and adoptive placements we have made over the years at You Gotta Believe!)

And when we identify someone known to the youth we ask that person to take a 10 week learning and preparation experience (we call our learning experience A-OKAY or Adopting Older Kids And Youth) to see if making a lifetime commitment to this youth they so care about is something that they can do. Our statistics and research show this is the single most effective way to recruit a lifetime parent for a youth aging out of care. During a four year period under a Federal Demonstration grant it took nearly 1,000 prospective applicants from the general public to walk through our doors for an orientation to get 37 youth a life time parent. During that same four year period it only took 154 prospective applicants to walk through our doors who knew a teen to get 83 youth placed into a lifetime family. This approach is a simple highly efficient means of recruiting permanent parents that lead to the creation of permanent adoptive families for youth aging out between ages 18 and 21.

2) The Acquaintances Approach:

There are many youth in the system where it is believed by the people around them that they have no constructive adults in their lives that one can reach out to. For these youth we set up opportunities for them to

share the same time and space with our prospective and certified families. We do this by bringing youth into our A-OKAY parent preparation classes as consultants to teach our prospective families what it is like to be a teen growing up in foster care system. Many families who came forward having no interest in adopting teens had decided that a teen on our panel was someone that they could adopt. Dozens and dozens of youth have been placed as a direct result of sharing the same time and space and becoming acquaintances with the prospective and certified families who were taking our A-OKAY classes. This is the second best way we have found to find permanent parents for the oldest of the older youth in care.

3) **The Community Education Approach**

Years ago our organization realized that we were having little success trying to sell what we were doing to the general public in 15 or 30 second sound bites. That is why we created our own media, both TV and radio. One half hour at a time dedicated to the need to find permanent parents for teens and young adults about to be discharged from the foster care system. These broadcasts introduced the general public to the teens in need of families and the permanent parents who adopted the teens. In addition we had special guests who served both populations talking about the special needs of both populations.

We do a cable access program that anyone can watch while it live-streams in Brooklyn, New York, where our main office is. This broadcast serves a local purpose of recruiting local parents and a more global purpose by introducing and inspiring the rest of the world by meeting the wonderful youth who need homes and the parents who adopt them in one half hour of thoughtful interviews and conversations. In addition, we do a live radio broadcast every Sunday evening which is also live streamed on the internet and archived on a website. All the links to access these important broadcasts are included in my written statement.

Our Community Education efforts earned us the Adoption Excellence Award in 2007 from the Department of Health and Human Services in the category of **Media/Public Awareness of Adoption From Foster Care**.

To access our Television program website: <http://bricartsmedia.org/community-media/bcat-tv-network> And then click on Channel 2 every and any Thursday at 12 noon and again at 8pm Eastern Time.

To access our radio program website: www.am1240wgbb.com every Sunday evening from 8-8:30pm Eastern Time. Should you miss the broadcast it will be archived by the end of the following week and can be listen to at www.adoptingteensandtweens.com Should you be in the New York City area you can listen on the radio on 1240 on the AM dial if you are in Nassau County, Western Suffolk County, most parts of Queens, many parts of Brooklyn, and the New Jersey Shore.

WHERE SHOULD ADOPTION INCENTIVES AWARDS BE RE-INVESTED?:

There are two equally important areas where re-investing adoption incentive funds would be extraordinary useful as we place older youth with permanent parents to create life time families through adoption.

The first is funding to continue efforts to recruit the very permanent parents that we know are out there for each and every youth. Re-investing these incentive dollars to utilize the three prong strategies noted above

would be an impactful way to get more youth into permanent families **before** their discharge from the system. Parents and families are the foundation and springboard to every child's future. Parents and families give every youth access to the village we so often talk about needing to raise children. It sure does take a village to raise a child **but only if** that child has a parent in that village to provide the foundation he or she needs. This is equally true for the 18, 19, 20, or 21 year olds as it would be for an infant, toddler or latency age child.

Secondly, we must support families after their youth move in. Almost all the youth at the age range we place have had serious trauma in their lives. We prepare parents for what to expect, but we must also be there to support them during their hard times after their new sons and daughters move in. Funds should be re-invested to help these families maintain their commitments during the inevitable episodes and outbreaks that surface due to each youth's individual trauma. The more we support these newly created families, the stronger these families will remain.

If we can provide these two basic adoption services, then each youth will have what the child welfare system promised them when they first came into foster care: and that promise was a home that provides safety, the opportunity for well-being, and a permanent parent and family who will be there for them long after their years in foster care are over.

I want to thank Chairman Rep. Dave Reichert and Ranking member Rep. Lloyd Doggett and the rest of the sub-committee on Human Resources for giving me the opportunity to represent *You Gotta Believe! The Older Child Adoption & Permanency Movement, Inc* at today's hearing.

Some readings I would recommend include the following (feel free to e-mail at ygbpat@msn.com if you would like for me to e-mail any of these papers or articles to you):

Avery, Rosemary J., *An Examination of Theory and Promising Practice for Achieving Permanency for Teens Before They Age Out of Foster Care*, *Children & Youth Services Review* 32 (2010) pgs. 399-408

O'Brien, Patrick, *When You Take the P.A.R.E.N.T. Out of PERMANENT You're Left With M.(ostly) N.(ot) E.(nough)* Paper written for a workshop presented at a North American Council on Adoptable Children Conference.

O'Brien, Patrick, *Youth Homelessness and the Lack of Adoptive and Other Permanent Parental Planning For Teens In Foster Care: Preventing Homelessness Through Parenting*. Paper written for a workshop presented at a North American Council on Adoptable Children Conference.

O'Brien, Patrick *Unconditional Commitment: The Only Love That Matters ... to Teens* An Article written and published in *Fostering Families Today* and a variety of other publications and newsletters.

Respectfully Submitted by,

Pat O'Brien

Pat O'Brien, MS, LMSW
 Founder & Executive Director
*You Gotta Believe! The Older Child Adoption
 & Permanency Movement, Inc*

Chairman REICHERT. Thank you, Mr. O'Brien.
Ms. Dobbins, you are recognized.

**STATEMENT OF NICOLE DOBBINS,
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, VOICE FOR ADOPTION**

Ms. DOBBINS. Chairman, Ranking Member, Members of the Subcommittee, I direct an organization that is an advocacy organization called Voice for Adoption. Our members recruit families, and they provide postadoption support services.

I would like to shed light on four key areas within my time: The rate of adoption from foster care is increasing, but adoption of older youth continues to be a struggle. Our aging-out youth population you heard about, we need to connect them to permanency before exiting. Postadoption services is a critical need identified, but there are a lack of resources to support these efforts. And lastly, accountability for Federal funds that have been dedicated to adoption, we need to make sure that we are reviewing those to ensure that reinvestment is happening as required by law.

The Fostering Connections Act as well as the ASFA of 1997 took great strides in increasing adoptions. The rate of adoption has increased by 77 percent, but more needs to be done.

Consistent with the national number of children in foster care decreasing, so is the number of children waiting to be adopted. As adoption populations decline, States won't be able to continue to meet and exceed the rates they are basing their adoption incentives on, which is fiscal year 2007.

Voice for Adoption recommends adjusting the baseline level so that more current levels are reflected so that the Adoption Incentives program can continue to be an effective approach.

We also request that detailed reports on the number of adoptions by each category be reported by HHS, because currently only information about the amounts is being reported. It is hard to have a clear picture of what types of increases States are having because of this amount-only information being reported.

Despite the achievements we have seen, connecting waiting children with adoptive families still is a struggle within these States. It is critical that we find ways to increase the likelihood of adoption of older youth, and as you understand from what you have heard, promising practices for older youth differ from that of young children. These efforts include a variety of things that should be strengthened, encouraged at the State level, including youth engagement, permanency planning, smaller caseloads, intensive family finding, kinship connections, and reunification efforts when possible. Voice for Adoption recommends reauthorizing the Family Connection grant.

Another way we see to continue to promote the effective practices to encourage State leverage of public-private partnerships is to promote a key provision of the Fostering Connections Act, which is the Federal Title IV-E reimbursement training for a range of services. We believe that this benefit has not yet—the expansion has not yet been realized, and we recommend that some clarity in successful State examples be pushed through HHS, specifically toward effective models that we know work for adopting children, specifically older children.

When we take these youth from their homes, we know that we have an obligation to create better circumstances for them, and right now as a system we are failing older youth. An area that warrants greater examination is something you have already heard about, the APPLA case goal. It replaced long-term foster care in the legislation 16 years ago, but we fear, and there is a growing concern in the field, that it simply changed the terminology and not the trajectory of these young people's lives.

Voice for Adoption recommends providing incentives to States for the reduction of youth who exit without permanent connections. Furthermore, I urge the Committee to hold future hearings on this specific issue.

I have two last points. Postadoption services help adoptive families and children move through the stages of becoming a family, especially children who have been adopted from foster care, as they work through past traumas and strengthen the family as a unit. The Federal Government has invested millions of dollars into increasing adoptions without reciprocal mandates to services to support these families after finalization.

There has been a great deal of research about the quality of postadoption services, and parents sometimes are faced with seeing practitioners who don't understand the dynamics, which escalates the issues. For this we recommend greater development of implementation of adoption-competent mental health providers and appropriate funding streams to accomplish this goal. Specifically we recommend that States be required to use the adoption incentive bonuses to meet the needs of families postadoption.

Lastly, I would like to highlight an issue that you may be interested in, which is the Fostering Connections maintenance-of-efforts provision that came out of the Federal de-link for the adoption assistance. States are seeing a greater increase in their budgets. Due to this, the Congressional Budget Office scored the Fostering Connections Act at a \$1.4 billion savings to States. The Federal Government required States to reinvest the savings back into child welfare and adoption services, but despite legislative attempts, it has been unclear whether these funds are being reinvested.

As States continue to accrue savings on what they would have been spending on State adoption assistance, there is an even greater opportunity for the investment in making sure that post-adoption services are available. With that, we recommend that a percentage of these funds be designated if no other funds are, and that public reporting of these uses by States are reported by HHS.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Dobbins follows:]

Voice for Adoption
SPEAKING OUT FOR OUR NATION'S WAITING CHILDREN



Testimony by:

Nicole Dobbins,
Executive Director
Voice for Adoption

Before the:

United States House Committee on Ways and Means,
Subcommittee on Human Resources

For the hearing:

Increasing Adoptions from Foster Care
February 27, 2013

Voice for Adoption
1220 L. Street, NW
Suite #100-344
Washington, DC 20005

Hello, Chairman Dave Reichert, Ranking Member Lloyd Doggett and members of the Subcommittee on Human Resources. I am Nicole Dobbins, Executive Director of Voice for Adoption (VFA). I am pleased to appear before you today to provide testimony regarding the importance of increasing adoptions for children in our nation's foster care system who are awaiting permanent families. Thank you for having this significant hearing and thank you for the opportunity to be a part of this distinguished panel.

Let me start by saying Voice for Adoption¹ is a membership advocacy organization. We speak out for our nation's 104,000 waiting children in foster care and the families that adopt children with special needs. VFA members, who are spread across the country, recruit families to adopt children and youth in foster care who are waiting for a permanent family. Our members also provide vital support services both before and after adoption finalization to help adoptive families through the challenges they sometimes face in parenting children who have experienced abuse or neglect. VFA members are dedicated to finding permanent, loving families for every waiting child in foster care. We are also committed to ensuring federal policies and funding match the ongoing needs of these children and their adoptive families.

I would like to shed light on four key areas within my allotted five minutes:

1. The rate of adoption from foster care is increasing, but the adoption of older youth continues to be a struggle for States.
2. Youth who "age-out" are a vulnerable population and more must be done to secure permanency for these youth before exiting foster care.
3. Adoption experts—both professionals and families alike—identify post-adoption services as a critical need to support families, but a lack of resources to support these efforts is still a challenge.

¹ Voice for Adoption is a coalition whose Board of Directors is composed of Adopt America Network, Adoption Exchange Association, The Adoption Exchange Inc., Child Welfare League of America, Children Awaiting Parents, Consortium for Children, Family Builders Network, Kinship Center, Lilliput Children's Services, National Adoption Center, New York Council on Adoptable Children, North American Council on Adoptable Children, Spaulding for Children-Michigan, and Three Rivers Adoption Council.

4. State accountability for the use of federal adoption funding should be reviewed to ensure that reinvestment into supporting adopted children and their families' is happening as required by law.

Overall, there have been great improvements since the federal government placed an emphasis on the importance of timelier adoptions of children from foster care when the *Adoption and Safe Families Act* (ASFA) of 1997 (P.L. 105-89) was enacted. Since that time the rate of adoption has increased (by approximately 77 percent) and the average time from removal to adoption has declined (by 14 months)². Additionally, the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 (P.L. 110-351) took great strides to provide additional resources to States to ensure support for increasing adoptions, but more must be done. Through the Fostering Connections Act, the Adoption Incentive Program was improved and reauthorized through fiscal year 2013. The Fostering Connections Act revised the baselines against which adoption increases are measured, and doubled awards for increased adoptions of children age nine and older (increased to \$8,000) as well as for younger children with special needs (increased to \$4,000). Under the law States also have the opportunity to earn incentives for increasing their rate of adoptions (calculated by dividing the total number of adoptions by the total number of children in foster care on the last day of the fiscal year and multiplying by 100).

As you know, the Adoption Incentive program is set to expire at the end of this fiscal year and as States' overall foster care population decline, so are the number of adoption finalizations. Consistent with the national number of children in foster care decreasing so has the number of children waiting to be adopted as well (134,000 in FY2002 compared to 104,000 in FY2011). The number of children adopted from foster care each year has stayed above 51,000 since 2002. The peak was seen in fiscal year 2009, the year after the updated baseline from the Adoption Incentive Program was enacted, with 57,000 children adopted in that year. The number of children adopted in FY 2011, the last year we have data from, was 51,000 adoptions.

² National Resource Center for Adoption, A Service of the Children's Bureau & Member of the T/TA Network. *The Roundtable*, Volume 25: Number 2 (2012).

After the enactment of the Fostering Connections Act, all but six States and the District of Columbia have received an incentive payment in at least one year. In FY2009 all but twelve States received an incentive payment, but by FY2011 twenty-two States did not receive any incentive.³ Since the number of children in foster care and the number of youth waiting to be adopted have declined over 20% in the past five years (this is good news), states can't continue to exceed their FY2007 baseline number of adoptions and will not be able to achieve the adoption incentives. It is important to note that the incentive payments related to the adoption rates are only available to States if there is money left after the initial bonuses have been allocated. Despite foster care population declines, adoption rates have remained stable, which suggests that the rate of adoptions may be a greater indicator of success. Some greater priority should be given to rates of adoption, especially for older youth. For example if a State has increased their adoption rates, but not increased enough over their baseline level to achieve the per child adoption incentives, are we not providing an incentive for the rate increase achievement? The answer to this question is hard to answer, because we don't have adequate reporting on what State achievements are in each of the adoption incentive categories; we encourage this to be examined more closely.

As the Subcommittee is reviewing the reauthorization of this program, **Voice for Adoption recommends adjusting the adoption baseline to more current levels in order to ensure that the Adoption Incentives continue to be an effective approach to increasing the number of adoptions. Additionally, we request detailed reports on the number of adoptions in each category, as well as the State use of the awards. It is hard to have a clear picture of what types of increases in adoption States are receiving the bonuses for, because in recent years HHS has only reported on the total dollar amount States have earned rather than any detail of what was achieved. Additionally States are not required to report the use of the incentive dollars, so tracking use of these funds is also difficult.**

³ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families (Aug. 2012) *Adoption Incentives Earning History by State: FY 1998-FY2011*. Washington, DC.

The adoption of older youth continues to be a struggle for States

Despite the achievements we've seen in connecting waiting children with adoptive families, states still struggle to meet the needs of older youth waiting for permanent families. In a recent analysis published by the National Resource Center for Adoption, a review of data found that only 26.1 percent of all *adoptions* were of children ages 9 and older, while at the same time 40.6 percent of children *waiting* for adoption were 9 or older. This represents the lowest percentages of older youth adoptions since the enactment of ASFA in 1997. It is critical that we find ways to increase the likelihood of adoption for older youth, because otherwise we will continue to allow legal orphans to exit our nation's foster care system to unfortunate outcomes (and there has been much research dedicated to what happens to youth when they exit foster care without permanent connections). For older youth adoption, promising practices include a variety of efforts that should continue to be strengthened and taken up by states to ensure success for this population. These practices, which you will hear about in depth from my colleagues on the panel, include: youth engagement in permanency planning, smaller caseloads, intensive family finding, kinship connections and reunification efforts. To facilitate these efforts, **Voice for Adoption recommends reauthorizing the funding for the Family Connections grants,⁴ which are also set to expire at the end of this year.**

Another way to continue to promote these effective practices is to encourage States to leverage public-private partnerships to promote adoptions of children in foster care. A key provision of the Fostering Connections Act provides federal Title IV-E reimbursement for training a range of service providers and caregivers (court personnel, attorneys, guardian ad litem, court appointed special advocates, and perspective relative guardians as well as foster and adoptive parents). Funding for this provision was phased in over 5 years with full 75 percent reimbursement in fiscal year 2012 and beyond. The

⁴ Family Connections grants are for projects and integrated programs for intensive family-finding activities and family group decision-making meetings (FDGM), kinship navigator programs and residential family treatment project in supporting connections with family members to build the capacity to meet the needs of children and families.

benefits of the training expansion of the Fostering Connections Act in promoting public private partnerships are yet to be realized. Clarity is needed from HHS on key implementation issues. **Voice for Adoption recommends that States utilize the enhanced Title IV-E training dollars toward the use of effective models that move older children out of foster care and into permanent families and we urge the Subcommittee to encourage HHS to issue guidance or further clarity identifying successful State examples of such opportunities.**

Youth who “age-out” are a vulnerable population and more must be done to secure permanency for these youth before exiting foster care

As a system we are failing older youth. The number of youth who age out of foster care annually is more than 26,000. There is a growing trend in the percentage of emancipated youth whose parental rights have been terminated (16.3 percent in FY2011 compared to 6.1 percent in FY2000)⁵. Youth who leave foster care to live on their own face significant challenges, including homelessness and inadequate housing, limited or no postsecondary education or training, unemployment or underemployment, involvement with the criminal justice system, mental health and substance abuse challenges, and early parenthood⁶. When we take these youth away from their birth families, we have an obligation to create better circumstances for them. As a nation we must do a much better job at connecting these youth to permanency rather than emancipating them to no one and putting them on a trajectory toward poor outcomes.

An area that warrants greater examination for older youth is their designated case plan. Over the years there have been mounting and justified concerns regarding the use of APPLA as a permanency goal for children and youth in foster care. “APPLA” is: Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement. It replaced “Long Term Foster Care” in legislation 16 years ago. It was intended to be used only when other permanency options such as reunification, adoption, and kinship or guardianship care are ruled out. Roughly

⁵ Analysis prepared by Penelope L. Maza, Ph.D. based on data from the Cornell Data Archive as of February 2013.

⁶ Courtney, M.E., Dworsky, A., Hook, J., Brown, A., et al. (2011). Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth. Retrieved February 22, 2013 from: http://www.chapinhall.org/sites/default/files/Midwest%20Evaluation_Report_4_10_12.pdf

12 percent of children in care have this case goal, however some State data reflect numbers as high as 20 percent of their foster care population with this goal⁷. The APPLA term was established because far too many children were being given the permanency goal of long-term foster care and Congress made the right decision to remove that as a goal. However there is a growing concern in the field that APPLA has simply replaced long-term foster care, changing the terminology but not the outcomes for youth.

Too many youth report not being asked more than once, if at all, if they would consider being adopted and secondly youth report feeling forced down a path of independence while not fully understanding what permanency is⁸. Youth who have had parents throughout childhood and adolescence have the foundation of family while establishing greater independence. Yet, youth in foster care are asked to make the life altering decision of “choosing to want” to be adopted at the very time that developmentally they are seeking independence. Should youth refuse to consider adoption, they commonly are assigned a permanency goal of APPLA. Additionally, there is a correlation between older youth and their placement settings. Nationally, over one-third (36%) of youth in care who are age 16 and older are in group homes or institutional settings⁹, where typically efforts are not made to connect them with permanent families and other caring adults.

While the APPLA case goal had good intentions and at the time was progressive in thinking, we have learned a lot about what happens to youth when they exit care alone and we have heard from the other panelists that better practices have been developed to serve this population. It is time for the federal government to revisit the use of APPLA as a permanency plan option for older youth. **Voice for Adoption recommends providing incentives to States for the reduction of youth who exit without permanent**

⁷ The case goal APPLA was enacted after AFCARS data reporting, so States still report goals of “Long Term Foster Care” or “emancipation”. Establishment of one of these goals suggests that the other permanent options were ruled out. Congressional Research Service Report, *Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement (APPLA) as a Permanency Goal for Children in Foster Care* (February 2012).

⁸ U.S. Senate Caucus on Foster Youth, “Call to Action,” October 7, 2010. Retrieved February 21, 2013 from: <http://www.finance.senate.gov/newsroom/recordings/release/?id=98aaed19-1918-41a9-a11a-d6ff11b51990>

⁹ Annie E. Casey, Kids Count, May 2011

connections. Furthermore I urge this Committee to hold future hearings on this topic, to establish a national strategy to address this vulnerable population of youth.

Post-adoption services remain a critical need, yet lack of resources legislated

The federal government has invested millions of dollars into increasing adoptions without adequate assurances that these children and families will be safe and secure post-finalization. These services include assistance, such as: parent and youth support groups, crisis intervention, family therapy, respite care, and educational advocacy. Post-adoption services help adoptive families and children move through the predictable stages of becoming a family – working through past traumas and strengthening the well-being of all family members. A Casey Family Services report stated, “As states have increased the numbers of adoptions with legislative mandates and fiscal incentives, this push for more timely permanence for children in foster care has not been accompanied by parallel mandates or incentives for states to support families once the adoption is legalized.”¹⁰ Parents are often faced with seeing practitioners that do not understand the dynamics of adoption and foster care – this only adds to the challenges of families who are seeking assistance to meet their children’s emotional and mental health needs.

Although there has been a great deal of research on the need for quality post-adoption services, funding for such supports are not readily accessible. **Voice for Adoption recommends that a greater emphasis be placed on the access of adoption competent mental health providers and that appropriate funding streams be mandated to accomplish this goal. Specifically, we recommend that states be required to use adoption incentive bonuses for post-adoption support services for children and families.**

¹⁰ Casey Family Services, *The Casey Center for Effective Child Welfare Practice, Promising Practices in Adoption Competent Mental Health Services* (2003) Retrieved February 21, 2013 from: <http://www.aecf.org/upload/publicationfiles/promising%20practices%20in%20adoption.pdf>

Federal adoption funding should be reviewed to ensure reinvestment into child welfare and adoption

The Fostering Connections Act included a major provision that resulted in the federal government taking on a larger share of what States would otherwise be spending on adoption assistance. Before Fostering Connections, tens of thousands of children were not eligible for federal Title IV-E adoption assistance; in FY2008 states reported that just over 20 percent of adopted children who received adoption assistance received no federal support¹¹. When the Congressional Budget Office scored the Fostering Connections Act they projected a \$1.4 billion savings to States over ten years (and \$126 million over 5 years). The federal government required States to reinvest these savings back into child welfare, including post-adoption services. Despite legislative attempts in two federal laws (the Fostering Connections Act and the Child Welfare Improvement and Innovation Act of 2011), HHS has been unable to report what types of services, if any, States are spending the savings on. Initial guidance to States following the Fostering Connections Act stated that States had the flexibility to determine and calculate the savings, but were not required to provide a specific accounting of the funds to the Department of HHS¹². Congress enacted legislation in 2011 reiterating the expectation for an accounting of the Title IV-E adoption assistance savings. An Information Memorandum was issued to States directing agencies to “now document how savings (if any) are spent when using the applicable child eligibility criteria in the title IV-E adoption assistance program (sections 473(a)(2)(A)(ii) and (e) of the Act.¹³” Whether the funds are being reinvested into child welfare and adoption services is unknown because access to the State reports continues to be a challenge.

¹¹ DeVooght, K. Fletcher, M. Vaughn, B., & Cooper, H. (2012). Federal, State, and Local Spending to Address Child Abuse and Neglect in SFYS 2008 and 2010.

¹² U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2010). Guidance on Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008. ACYF-CB-PI-10-11.

¹³ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2011) Child and Family Services Improvement and Innovation Act; Titles IV-B, IV-E and section 1130 of the Social Security Act; Promoting Safe and Stable Families Program; Child Welfare Services Program. ACYF-CB-IM-11-06.

As States continue to accrue savings on what they would have been spending on state adoption assistance there is an even greater opportunity for an investment in making sure families are stable through the availability of post-adoption support. **Voice for Adoption believes that a percentage of the adoption funds states have saved from the federal adoption assistance de-link should be reinvested into services to support families after they adopt children from foster care, to ensure families are able to meet the ongoing needs of their children. Public reporting on the use of State reinvestment funds should also be required so State advocates have a tool to make sure funds are being reinvested.**

Conclusion

I would like to sincerely thank the Subcommittee for its interest in hearing perspectives for improvements to increasing adoptions from foster care. As you work to improve outcomes for children waiting to be adopted and adoptive families committed to raising children who often come with painful pasts, I hope you will take into consideration the recommendations presented before you today. In closing we appreciate the dedication of this Subcommittee; as demonstrated your work on children's issues remains a priority across party lines. We look forward to your continued efforts on behalf of children and families.

Respectfully Submitted,



Nicole Dobbins,
Executive Director
Voice for Adoption

Chairman REICHERT. Thank you.

And now we move into the question phase, so we will have an opportunity to use up 5 minutes and ask you some questions, too.

We will focus on some of those things you just mentioned to us in your testimony. For example, in fiscal year 2011, HHS reported that there were over 38,000 children who had been in foster care for over 5 years. In the same year over 26,000 kids aged out of foster care with no permanent family connection, and this, again, was a point most of you made during your testimony.

Why do some of these kids stay in foster care so long?

Ms. SORONEN. Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, based on our experience with this child-focused program across the Nation, in all of the States, what we see are a number of layers of challenges to getting these children out of care. You saw the “unadoptable” word. Unfortunately, with lack of training at the feet-to-the-ground level with social workers to show that the children on their caseload are adoptable, we hear time and again caseworkers assuming that they can’t be adopted, so let’s put our resources into helping them age out of care. So first we have to train, I think, the frontline workers a little bit better about these children, their needs, and their adoptability.

We also have the very children themselves who have suffered such trauma in their lives, who have moved—what I didn’t share is 10 percent of the children in the Wendy’s Wonderful Kids program had moved 10 or more times before they landed on the caseloads. So when a child moves multiple times, attends multiple schools, there is no reason to trust a notion of an adoptive family being any better for them. But what we found is when we had dedicated adoption recruiters who could work with those children, talk to them, explain and maybe work away some of their fears about simple things like changing their name or that they may not have to move again, the value of a family, the majority of the children who had previously been opposed to adoption then moved toward considering adoption. This is critical because those are the children who express a voice in court, and the court makes a designation of another planned permanent living arrangement or long-term foster care for that child.

So it is that sort of devil’s mix of wanting to respect a child’s wishes, but sometimes those wishes are based on further trauma in the system that has said to them, I don’t want to be adopted. So training for the frontline workers, I think, and making sure that they are working with the children so that they can understand the value of adoption.

Chairman REICHERT. I am going to follow up on that just a little bit. On page 3 of your testimony, you noted that half the children Wendy’s Wonderful Kids worked with never previously had anyone work with them to find an adoptive home. Are there any Federal policies that contribute to that or other reasons why children might stay in foster care so long without anyone helping them or finding them an adoptive home?

Ms. SORONEN. I don’t think so much there are Federal policies that push that they stay in care, but the way that we have trained our workers to deal with older youth has not been beneficial to getting them out of care. So putting their face on a website, for exam-

ple, is one tactic, but then that charismatic wish that someone will see their face and come adopt them, let's face it, when we are all in a social setting, and we talk about teenagers, we all kind of screw up our faces. In just normal families teenagers are a challenge. Imagine a teenager who has been in care for 10 years, who has multiple challenges, who has pushed back against adoption, and a worker simply stops working on their behalf and says, what I think is best for this child is moving forward, and parents aren't stepping forward, either.

So I think it is we can't legislate changing attitudes, but we can show success, that these children can be served, that they can be adopted and help drive a public will for getting them adopted.

Chairman REICHERT. Yes. One of the biggest frustrations I had working on the street and working with kids, was trying to get them convinced that they were adoptable, that they could move into an adoptive home. So I have been a witness to that. I think you are very accurate in your description.

One last quick question. Mr. O'Brien, your organization works with youth who are close to aging out of foster care. Why have those kids been waiting so long, in your view?

Mr. O'BRIEN. In my view, it is because no law mandates that we must continue to never stop looking for a family. Almost all of those kids are receiving APPLA services, teaching them to prepare for adulthood, when they have everything provided for them up until a certain birthday, whether it is 18, 19, 20 or 21, and then after that birthday they have been prepared for aging out, they age out, and they have absolutely nothing provided for them.

If at the exact same time we were preparing them for adulthood we never stopped looking for a family, by law we would have found many, many more kids, because the crime is not finding the family, the crime is not even having to look for the family, and when kids get old, we don't have to look.

Chairman REICHERT. Thank you so much for your answers.

And, Mr. Doggett, you are recognized for 5 minutes for questioning.

Mr. DOGGETT. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thanks to each of our witnesses not only for your testimony, but for the devotion you show to this very important and challenging cause.

The small role that we can play relates to the reauthorization of these two specific laws, and I gather that each of you favor our reauthorizing the Adoption Incentives program. Have you had—I believe, Ms. Dobbins, you mentioned the Family Connection grants, which is the newer program. Have any of our other witnesses, have you had experience with that program, and do you favor its reauthorization?

Mr. O'BRIEN. Well, I mean, I would certainly favor anything that is good for kids.

Mr. DOGGETT. Right.

Mr. O'BRIEN. It is just that it almost avoids the real issue. I mean, as we are providing more and more services, we are not—there is no mandate to continue working with kids to try to get them parents at the same time. So I would absolutely recommend the reauthorization of it, but I would like it a little bit stronger where there is a mandate to look for families at the same time.

Mr. DOGGETT. Ms. Rosati.

Ms. ROSATI. I would like to add that I think not only do we not have that mandate, we unintentionally create these incentives that end up pushing things to the outcomes that none of us would actually desire. And so as the issue that I mentioned, sometimes you may have benefits that are there for a child only when that child stays in the system and ages out of the system, so that if you are a parent—if you are a foster parent in the life of that child, or if you are an acquaintance or a friend, and you have a connection there, and you want that child to support—to be supported, to go to college, or to access the mental health services that they may need, you can't also say, let's go ahead and I will adopt you and be your forever family, because the minute you do that, you are going to sometimes in some places then lose the opportunity to go to college, lose the opportunity for the mental health services that you need that will be the foundation for a successful life going forward. And so I think replacing some of those disincentives in the system would also go a long way to providing the outcomes that we all desire.

Mr. DOGGETT. Thank you.

Ms. Dobbins.

Ms. DOBBINS. Yes, I just want to make a point trying to get to both questions there. One of the questions is how come kids stay in care so long. There is a correlation between placement setting of children in care, especially for older youth. A lot of older youth are in group home facilities, congregate care settings. What we know about those youth is that recruitment efforts don't typically happen, but what we have seen with Family Connection grants, at least preliminary evaluations, is that these are actual efforts in reviewing caseloads for some of the harder children to find homes for, which are the intensive family findings, so who are the relatives of these children.

And so, again, back to the correlation, if, you know, we have large populations of older youth in these facilities, then those are the ones not getting the attention that they really need to be working down some of the things that we talked about of, you know, what are their fears, do they want to be adopted, can we convince them that, you know, there is a family that wants them and that kind of thing.

So I hope that kind of answers both questions. I think the Family Connection grants start to work toward the practice that we are seeing greater improvements in.

Mr. DOGGETT. And why is it that we need additional data from HHS? And I guess in turn they are getting that from the States.

Ms. DOBBINS. Additional data on which, I am sorry?

Mr. DOGGETT. You indicated in your testimony that you wanted to see HHS reports by category. I am just asking you to expand on that.

Ms. DOBBINS. Oh, a very good question.

Mr. DOGGETT. I assume that means also they are requiring that from the States.

Ms. DOBBINS. I am sure they are. I just haven't seen reporting at, you know, the public level, because, you know, what is reported is how much States actually earn, but I think it is important to

also know what States are receiving the bonuses for, so in which categories? Are they receiving them because they are increasing the adoptions of older youth ages 9 and older; or is it because they are increasing the special needs adoptions; or is it because their rates of adoption are increasing, which is something important to note, because the rates of adoption are only provided as an incentive to States if there is money left over in the allotment? And so what we have seen is that rates of adoption have increased, but are there States that possibly have rate increases, but can't reach the individual adoptions over a certain baseline that aren't getting the incentives because that is an afterlook?

And so that is a question of, you know, a better reporting on the categories, or at least a deeper look into this as it is being reauthorized.

Mr. DOGGETT. Do the maintenance-of-effort requirements need to be altered?

Ms. DOBBINS. That is actually another issue. The maintenance of effort from the IV-E adoption assistance de-link is another issue. The Federal Government did a great job of legislating that these reinvestments do need to go back into child welfare services, but what we have seen is we are not really sure where they are going. We had hoped that States were spending them in the right places, but there is not a good reporting of that. And at Voice for Adoption we do believe since this money is coming from increasing adoptions, and we want to support that, that a modest percentage of that, 20 percent, be dedicated to continuing to support these families so that we are not seeing families, you know, disrupted and that their needs for trauma and abuse are looked at at the, you know, family level.

Mr. DOGGETT. Thank you.

Chairman REICHERT. The gentleman's time has expired.

Mr. Young is recognized.

Mr. YOUNG. Well, I thank you, Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member. This is a very important topic. I appreciate everyone's patience and presence here today. I know it has been a long day.

Lowering barriers to adoption and to supporting families post-adoption, I think there has been a Federal precedent for this effort. It is something we need to make sure that we continue and improve upon, and so your testimony has been helpful in guiding us in that regard.

I will start off with this question for anyone on the panel, feel free to respond, but from the standpoint of those who are seeking to adopt a child from foster care, how efficiently do the various Federal and State programs supporting adoption appear to work together, in your estimation?

And as you think about answering that, there may be some particular areas of focus that you want to attend to; perhaps the information that would-be adoptive parents need to access tax credits supporting adoption, do they receive sufficient information? Do they receive sufficient information about maintenance payments for children with special needs? Are they told of postadoption services from programs like Promoting Safe and Stable Families and Child Welfare Services?

I will leave this open to the panel.

Ms. DOBBINS. Yes, I will try to take a stab at that.

I think one thing you mentioned specifically that I would like to touch on is the adoption tax credit. What we have seen with the changes in the adoption tax credit that have happened in the last few years is that a lot of adoptive families are not able to access it because they don't have a tax liability high enough. I can follow up; there is great information behind this. So that is one issue. So it became refundable in 2010 for 2 years.

It takes a certain amount of time and effort for that information to trickle down from the Federal level to States, to families, to caseworkers, and what we have seen most recently that when it was just reauthorized in January, it was not refundable, and for 2012 it is not. But what families were told, and we keep hearing from families, that it was refundable, so they were looking forward to using those services, that money, to support, you know, their children after adoption. So there is a lack of, you know, what knowledge is really getting to the families, and so that could be shored up.

There was one other question that I wanted to get to.

Mr. YOUNG. I will actually be coming back to you.

Would others like a crack at that question?

Ms. ROSATI. Yes. As someone who went through the process four times, I think those are really great questions. We were not aware of the adoption tax credit in the beginning. I guess for some reason we just assumed it was only for intercountry adoption and not for foster care adoption, so we missed it for one or two kids. That was a bummer. But we were then able to access it after the fact.

I think that for the families that are going through the process, things are pretty overwhelming. The amount of paperwork is overwhelming, the time that things take can be overwhelming, the level of intrusiveness that it feels like into your life can be pretty overwhelming.

I don't say all of those things, however, to say that we need to change them all. I actually have a little bit of a counterintuitive perspective on that. I think if you are going to welcome home a child who has experienced previous trauma, you have to be ready for a lot of situations that do not fall under the umbrella of normal parenting, and so when you go through these processes that, frankly, are very difficult, I actually think it helps prepare you for the difficulty to come. And so I think there is a balance in how much we want to streamline.

Mr. YOUNG. Sure.

Ms. ROSATI. And so many of the processes, of course, are for safety, and so there is really not much that should be done.

Mr. YOUNG. Thank you.

I am going to follow up with Ms. Dobbins in my remaining time here. You mentioned a menu of different policy options that are available to us to both promote more adoptions and perhaps improve those postadoption connections. Mr. Doggett, I think, questioned you about more detailed HHS reporting. It makes great sense to me.

You mentioned State examples of best practices need to be better enforced or regulated by HHS. If you could briefly—we have about

30 seconds left—indicate what you are referring to there or speak to the reduction of incentives for States that do not end up with permanent connections at a high level.

Ms. DOBBINS. I think one thing is the IV–E training. We talked a lot about practices. I think it could be encouraged, especially with public and private partnerships, by using good examples of what this looks like. There is a reimbursement level that can be expanded, and—sorry, I am blanking on the next thing, but I hope that answers your question. I am happy to follow up after.

Mr. YOUNG. That is all right.

I yield back. Thank you.

Chairman REICHERT. Thank you.

The gentleman's time has expired. Mr. Griffin is recognized.

Mr. GRIFFIN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Ms. Rosati, I want to ask what are your funding sources for each of your groups, and how much of that is composed of State funding or Federal funding versus private sources?

Ms. ROSATI. We receive no government funding. We are funded by the generosity of our donors. And we are able to go into the areas that we work and essentially pay for the events ourselves so that we are able to hopefully add to the good work that has already been done in the community. And I think one of the reasons we are received well is that we are not asking for funds, we want to contribute our funds if they would like to have us.

Mr. GRIFFIN. Before I hear from the others, I just want to ask you, does that model represent a very unique sort of small percentage of the groups that assist, in your experience?

Ms. ROSATI. It seems like it, because people are pretty shocked and happy when we come in and offer that we want to contribute our resources to make those efforts work. So we are not aware of too many other things like that, but we are really happy to be a part of the good work that is already going on on the ground. And the public-private partnership is key. Having all of those stakeholders working together has been a real key to the success.

Mr. GRIFFIN. To the others, do you care to comment about your funding sources?

Mr. O'BRIEN. Sure. Our primary funding comes from local counties and the city of New York. And also the Dave Thomas Foundation funds three of our full-time staffers.

Mr. GRIFFIN. Great.

Mr. O'BRIEN. And then we raise some money, and we have a State contract through Adoption Opportunities Federal grant. So it is somewhat diverse, but it comes a lot from governmental local sources.

Mr. GRIFFIN. Ms. Dobbins, Ms. Soronen, do you wish to respond?

Ms. SORONEN. We are a national nonprofit public charity. Until 2012, we were exclusively funded through private donors and through our philanthropic partnerships.

When we released the research on the Wendy's Wonderful Kids model in 2011 and then approached the State of Ohio to scale that program as a test site for scaling was the first time we took State funds in order to scale that program, but we still manage them.

The funds come through us, and we manage those grants as a non-profit organization.

Mr. GRIFFIN. Ms. Dobbins.

Ms. DOBBINS. We are a very small advocacy organization. We are membership based, so our members actually pay in dues, annual modest dues. We don't receive government funding, Federal funding, and we receive donations as well.

Mr. GRIFFIN. Got you. Ms. Rosati, is your group the only faith-based group here today, or do any others represent faith-based organizations? And you would characterize yours as faith-based?

Ms. ROSATI. Absolutely, yes.

Mr. GRIFFIN. I am familiar with your group.

Mr. O'BRIEN. Well, we do a lot of believing at my place, but we don't—

Mr. GRIFFIN. Sure. Yes.

As a faith-based group, have you found that there are additional legal barriers because you are a faith-based group?

Ms. ROSATI. I am pleased to say that we have not really experienced barriers. We went into this with our eyes wide open, understanding that there may be some issues. We have had tremendous working relationships with our government partners. I think there are some basic rules we all observe about how it is that we interact, and it has worked very, very well.

I do know, however, that there are places where those who are involved in child welfare from a faith-based perspective have had difficulty maintaining their continued presence in those areas. And certainly the ability for those faith-based organizations to continue to operate in accordance with the dictates of their faith is something we think is very important. So while we haven't seen those barriers, we know that they exist, and we certainly hope that they won't expand any further in the States where we have already seen that happen.

Mr. GRIFFIN. I am running out of time, but I just want to real quickly ask, you mentioned, Ms. Rosati, that there were some Federal incentives that you thought were not necessarily accomplishing the stated goal. And that happens a lot with the Federal Government; well intentioned, but misses the mark. Can you elaborate on that a little bit?

Ms. ROSATI. Yes. The two biggies that we see a lot are the opportunity for those who age out of the system to go on to college and to have that funded and benefited. I think legislators at the State level are afraid it will break the bank. In fact, it will do no such thing. And because they limit it, if you go on and get adopted, you lose that benefit. You shouldn't have to choose between higher education and an adoptive family.

Another big one that we see a lot relates to certain kinds of mental health services that are fully funded and accessible if the teenager stays in foster care, but if they get adopted, then it becomes much more difficult to access.

And those would be two things I think where we would need parity in order to eliminate the disincentive that currently exists.

Mr. GRIFFIN. Thank you. Sounds like something we need to look at. Thank you.

Chairman REICHERT. Thank you.

Mr. Davis, you are recognized.

Mr. DAVIS. Thank you very much.

Let me thank the witnesses for coming. Chairman Reichert, Ranking Member Doggett, let me, first of all, thank you for this hearing. I think it is a very important one as we attempt to improve the Adoption Incentives Act.

For almost a decade now, I have advocated to draw on the successes of the Adoption Incentives program in increasing adoptions to amend the focus of the law to promote permanency. The witnesses have discussed the need to focus on finding permanent homes for foster children, and, as I understand it, there are three paths to permanency for foster youth: reunification, guardianship and adoption.

We know from research, including the GAO report requested by the Ways and Means Committee, that African American children stay in foster care longer because of difficulties in recruiting adoptive parents and a hesitancy to terminate parental rights as is required for adoption.

African American and Native American families tend to choose guardianship as a route to permanency rather than adoption because they do not see a need to legally sever the relationship or connection between parent and child.

Given the fact that my congressional district has the highest percentage of grandparents raising grandchildren in the Nation, followed by two other congressional districts in Illinois, one right next to mine and then the other one a little further away, guardianship as a permanency option is critically important. A grandmother raising her grandchild does not want to erase the legal connection of her own child to her grandchild. In the Fostering Connections law, this Subcommittee and Congress recognize the disproportionate negative effect of excluding guardianship with regard to foster care parents.

Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member and other Members of this Subcommittee, I ask you to help make sure that we improve the Adoption Incentives Act by encouraging States to promote permanency for foster children so that more children, and especially more children of color, can exit care to permanent homes faster.

Ms. Dobbins, you have done a great deal of work in this area, and Voices for Adoption does a great deal to promote permanency. Based upon your expertise on the Adoption Incentives program, what are some of the ways in which we can amend the law to better promote permanency?

Ms. DOBBINS. Thank you. And great question. I think what is important is permanency. We do support permanent options and in broadening the incentive, especially as we can look to what the Federal Government has done in this area of really promoting this and seeing a really big increase in States taking this on and those resources becoming a permanent family for kids who otherwise would be in foster care for long periods of time.

I think we also have to understand how to measure the incentive and make sure that it is the right fit, so we do support it.

Mr. DAVIS. My time is going to expire, Mr. Chairman, but if the other witnesses could just indicate whether or not they view this as a very important recognition.

Ms. SORONEN. Congressman, we do. And, in fact, when we provide our grants and set aggressive goals for those grants, we have included guardianships as those goals. And of those numbers I told you, nearly 200 of those finalized permanent numbers are guardianships.

Mr. O'BRIEN. And a lot of the homes that we find for older teenagers are with people that they are related to, and that is a very important source of permanent parents.

Ms. ROSATI. I concur as well. We have a partner out in the Seattle area who just formed what is called The Children's Law Center to provide volunteer lawyer services for the grandparents and others who are in the situation you described to allow them to lock in and get what they need in terms of permanent guardianship.

Mr. DAVIS. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and I yield back.

Chairman REICHERT. Thank you, Mr. Davis, and I look forward to working with you on this important issue that you just raised.

Mr. Renacci, you are recognized.

Mr. RENACCI. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to thank all the witnesses for being here.

Ms. Soronen, I want to thank you as a fellow Buckeye for being here and testifying as well.

Ms. SORONEN. Thank you.

Mr. RENACCI. Adoption is generally always a better outcome for kids than remaining in foster care. In addition to the benefits the child receives, I believe adoption has the potential to have huge economic benefits.

Ms. Soronen, you mentioned on page 7 of your testimony that your program is resulting in State savings as well, just in terms of the cost of foster care versus the cost of the program. Can you tell us more about the impact your program is having on State spending in Ohio?

Ms. SORONEN. Yes. And we were pleased that the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services came forward and said, we want to move these children out of foster care into adoptive homes. And I believe in their heart of hearts that is their first goal, but they also understand the financial impact.

Ohio is one of those States that has not been able to hit the threshold of adoption incentives for a number of years. And so this program, as we looked at it and worked with the fiscal manager at the Ohio Department, we said, help us understand what is the financial impact in Ohio, so as we potentially move this to other States, we can use this as both the human and a financial template as well.

What we found is with a \$2.3 million investment from this budget from the Department, and then in—hopefully negotiated in the next biennial with Ohio, over a 3-year period with a potential \$6 or \$7 million investment, what they believe is the savings to the State will be in excess of \$100 million, and that is because we are getting children age 9, 10 or 11, and we know that by the time a child turns 8, the likelihood of adoption is significantly decreased. So to keep a 9- or 10-year-old in care for 8 or 10 more years, if you look at those costs, take out the subsidy that the State provides, that savings is still significant.

And the State has said to us they look forward to using those savings to continue to invest in embedding and growing this as best practice for Ohio's older youth.

Mr. RENACCI. Thank you.

Ms. Dobbins, I want to go a little further on the incentive payments. You know, as you mentioned in your testimony, 22 States did not receive incentive payments for fiscal year 2011. I know this is an issue that does affect the State of Ohio. Not only did Ohio not receive incentive payments for 2011, but the last incentive payment Ohio received was for fiscal year 2003.

But I know Ohio has made great strides to increase the rate of adoption, yet the way the program is currently structured, Ohio does not receive incentive payments for its progress.

Should the current baseline remain, or should it be changed again?

Ms. DOBBINS. I think there are two things, and I did highlight this as an example, where there is opportunities where States are increasing the rates of adoption, but the rate of adoption is after-look, so States only get that incentive if there is still funding allotted for the adoption incentives.

So the first way that States get money is that they have to increase the numbers of adoptions of older youths and children with special needs above a baseline which was set in fiscal year 2007, but if then they can show that they have also increased the rates of adoption, then whatever money is left over, the States receive that incentive.

So we do think this should be looked at more closely, especially by people who do data analysis, to see if changing it affects the rate, and if that is a greater indicator of success among States, we think that might be an issue that the Subcommittee could look at.

Mr. RENACCI. Do you see waiting periods for foster youth to continue to decline?

Ms. DOBBINS. Well, populations of foster care are declining, yes. So these numbers have steadily declined over time, even the number of waiting children. So, yes, we do.

Mr. RENACCI. Ms. Soronen, do you have any comments on the baseline, especially since it affects Ohio?

Ms. SORONEN. I think I agree with everything that Nicole has mentioned. I would also add that we should look at what Mr. O'Brien talked about, those caseloads of children in long-term foster care, and scrub those caseloads and see what we can do relative to the Adoption Incentives program of also assuring that those children aren't simply in that indeterminate status for their lifetime in foster care of another planned permanent living arrangement.

Mr. RENACCI. Do any of the other witnesses have any comments on the baseline at all to add?

All right. Thank you. I yield back, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman REICHERT. Well, you made it. That concludes the questioning. So we just appreciate you waiting, being patient with the rest of what we were doing here today. And then just a real heartfelt thank you for what you do for our young people across the country.

And I know this was a good hearing, because Mr. Young just whispered in my ear, "This is an excellent hearing." And you heard

Mr. Davis' comments about, thank you for holding this hearing. So we take this issue very, very seriously. And just again, thank you so much for being here and for your patience today.

So if Members have additional questions for the witnesses, they will submit them to you in writing, and we would appreciate receiving your responses for the record within 2 weeks.

And now the Committee stands adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 5:20 p.m., the Subcommittee was adjourned.]

[Submissions for the Record follow:]

Statement for the Record Submitted by:

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Before the:
United States House Committee on Ways and Means,
Subcommittee on Human Resources

For the hearing:
Promoting Permanent Families Through Kinship Care
March 13, 2013

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony today on the importance of relatives to promoting permanent families for children in foster care. We are Carol Ramirez, COO, and Beverly Johnson, Director of Programs, at Lilliput Children's Services. We sincerely thank the committee for the opportunity to relay important information that supports the goal of increasing permanency options for foster children through kinship care and would like to share our promising outcomes from our 3-year demonstration project as a grantee of the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 (Fostering Connections Grants).

Lilliput has provided therapeutic foster care services since 1980 becoming dually licensed in 1990 as an adoption agency. Since 1980, Lilliput has maintained successful child welfare partnerships throughout California and has served as a leader in forging practices that promote early permanency for children in foster care and enhanced post-placement well-being for adoptive and kin children and families. As the largest private agency provider of foster/adoption services in California, Lilliput completes over 500 foster/adoptions per year of which approximately 60% are kinship adoptions. Lilliput has been providing contracted adoption promotion and post-adoption support services throughout northern California since 2001. In addition to contracted services, Lilliput provides recruitment, permanency services, training and support services throughout Northern California. Lilliput's delivery of Kinship Support Services Programs (KSSP) in multiple counties complements the adoption/permanency work of the agency.

Lilliput was one of four agencies in California granted federal funding in 2009 through the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act. Through a public/private collaborative partnership, Lilliput launched the Kinnections Initiative in 2009 in Sacramento County to increase the number of kinship family members that could be located and placed with when children first entered care and to provide families with supportive services once children were placed with kin. The overall goals of the Kinnections Initiative were to significantly improve *permanency, stability* and *well-being* outcomes for a targeted population of children. Working in collaboration with the Sacramento County Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and other vital partners, the Kinnections Initiative upholds the fundamental philosophy that children whose parents have failed to protect and nurture them, are best raised by members of their extended family, and that relatives are an invaluable resource for children in foster care. Lilliput's mission, to ensure a child's

opportunity for permanency in a safe and nurturing family, includes the belief that permanency planning must begin from the moment a child enters out-of-home care. These efforts should continue throughout a child's stay in foster care to ensure that when he/she exits, birth family connections remain intact. The innovative Kinnections Initiative utilized a dual approach: intensive family finding and intensive kinship navigation services. The initiative targeted African-American children, ages 0-17 years, entering foster care for the first time in Sacramento County. Our intensive family finding approach was designed to provide a thorough and exhaustive search for kin, and initiate comprehensive engagement services once kin were located. The intensive kinship navigation strategy, Kinship Support Services Program Plus, provides intensive systems navigation, in-home case management and therapeutic support with the goal of placement stability and facilitating permanency. It was our intention to demonstrate, through a vigorous evaluation design, how specific changes in practices when children first enter care, as well as how concerted efforts and strategies to engage and support kin, can lead to significantly improved permanency, stability, and well-being outcomes for children and their families.

With Sacramento County's support, Lilliput launched the Kinnections Initiative in October 2009 and accepted our first referral to family finding in April 2010. Over the course of the three-year project, we have been able to evaluate 191 children in Family Finding and 74 children in Kinship Navigation. The project focused also on the issue of disproportionality in Sacramento County and made a bold attempt at targeting our strategies on one of the most challenging populations of children in our system: the overrepresentation of African-American children who statistically remain in care for longer periods of time than their counterparts.

Through a rigorous evaluation of the children and families served, the project was able to build evidence for a promising front-end model of family finding and kinship navigation. Through our family finding and engagement strategies, we were able to locate and place with relatives for 41% of the children referred. Referrals were sent to Kinnections after the county made initial efforts to locate family, which reinforces the need for increased intensity of family finding services up front and continuing to apply this intensity for several weeks or months thereafter. It is estimated that 78.5% of the children were on a path to permanency of some kind via reunification with birth parent, placement with kinship caregiver, and/or through adoption or guardianship.

Despite the short timeframe for which to evaluate safety, permanency, stability, and well-being outcomes for the 74 children in the experimental group of the kinship navigation service, there was interesting data, though not clinically significant, that deserves additional examination and study. The evaluation highlighted four interesting trends seen in the data when comparing the experimental and control group:

- (1) Fewer substantiated allegations of child abuse and neglect for the experimental group;
- (2) More children/youth in the experimental group who were at home in dependent supervision or reunified with birth parents than those in the control group;
- (3) Fewer participants in the experimental group who were placed with stranger foster parents at some point during the project than in the control group; and
- (4) More young children in the experimental group displaying an increase in protective factors than children in the control group.

Although a private/public collaboration was not without its challenges, we believe that it was vital to the Kinnections Initiative final success. The improved practice changes that resulted through a coordinated service delivery platform amongst multiple agencies and included Lilliput, Sacramento DHHS, the juvenile court, and children's legal representation, led to enhanced services for children and families in Sacramento County. It is our intention to build on this service model through our continued partnerships throughout Sacramento County and to continue to build on our shared vision and goal of increasing the likelihood of kinship placements leading to increased permanency and well-being outcomes for children.

We hope that in hearing about our project's success you are convinced of the need for continued funding of innovative programs and initiatives through public/private collaborations that seek to promote permanency and support for foster children through kinship care. We urge the Subcommittee to reauthorize funding for the Family Connections Grants so that innovative programs can continue to improve practice on behalf of children and families involved with the child welfare system. Thank you for being an advocate for these children and thank you for your leadership on adoption and foster care issues.



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March 12, 2013

RE: Increasing Adoptions from Foster Care Hearing, Feb. 27, 2013

Dear Honorable Members of the House Ways and Means Subcommittee on Human Resources:

As an adoption professional for twenty years, an adoptive parent and member of the Voice for Adoption (VFA), I would like to comment on the Increasing Adoptions hearing and provide feedback.

It was a pleasure to review the testimony provided on 2/27/13 by Nicole Dobbins, Executive Director of VFA. Her information resonated in so many ways with what we either experienced here in Pennsylvania or would anticipate as more and older children are adopted.

I have been a part of Pennsylvania's public private collaborative since 1995 and I have seen the progression of first increasing adoptions of children who were in care many years – then increasing adoptions for sibling groups, and then focusing on the older youth adoptions. All of those of course speak to the importance of federal programs such as the Adoption Incentive program and Title IV-E Adoption Assistance. These federal initiatives have increased the focus on the importance of providing permanency through adoption to children who are waiting in foster care.

Adoptive families experience ongoing challenges. States should be obligated to support the newly formed family to provide for their additional children and the emotional and behavioral challenges they bring. Those challenges can come either from their history of neglect or abuse, their multiple moves in care, prenatal exposure to drugs or alcohol, or other health or emotional issues, and then adding all of that to the unique and caring family who adopts. Over the years of looking for the right families, setting up post adoption and post permanency services that meet the needs of the families, and delivering services to increase the likelihood of older youth being placed and adopted, it became apparent that adoption assistance was one of the barriers to placement when not being implemented in a standard and straight forward manner – once addressed (through federal leadership) many more youth found placements and were adopted. Likewise, once post adoption services were offered and delivered and we were able to get feedback on the services, it became apparent that a family's just knowing they would have a safety net or support system, or someone to talk to who would understand their family's situation is a very important factor in caregivers deciding to take the final step to adopt. This makes post-adoption services just as critical as adoption awareness and promotion. The federal government should place a greater emphasis on establishing post-adoption support in every state.

Supporting well-being and permanency for children and families.

The federal government has committed to the importance of finding adoptive homes for so many children over the past 10+ years, the commitment to solidify those families by funding on-going services post-adoption is the right thing to do - especially when we are looking at the continued high numbers of youth "aging out" of the system without permanent connections and to unfortunate outcomes. There are more families to find, develop and connect to those youth. Committing to funding to support those families for several years after the adoption is a sound investment. Two services research tells us are important to families agrees with what we find in Pa, those are support groups for the adoptive parents and when possible for the children, and respite care which allows families a brief break with someone who knows and cares about their child or children. Respite provided properly removes the added trauma of exposing them to new and unfamiliar caregivers.

Not every family will need such services – but for many just knowing that these services are available is what can assist the prospective families in making the lifelong commitment to adopting a child from foster care. The importance of increasing adoptions has been an important federal initiative. I believe it is just as important – and can lead to increased adoptions – that the federal take a greater leadership role in ensuring post-adoption services are available in every state, and (in light of the expansion of permanent legal custody) even post-permanency services are available in every state.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Brenda Lawrence". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the typed name and title.

Brenda Lawrence,
Executive Director

supporting the public-private partnership in PA, known as the Statewide Adoption and Permanency Network.



Honorable Members of the Subcommittee,

Every year about 160 young adults in the District of Columbia receive a terrible birthday gift. On their 21st birthday they are pushed out of the District's foster care system and left to fend for themselves, with no place to call home and no one to guide them in building a life of their own. With the support systems they had come to rely on now gone, these young men and women are at high risk of homelessness and victimization. Often they have no one to turn to for guidance; no one to offer them support in times of need; no one to be proud of their accomplishments. Many have no one to visit on holidays; no one to take them to a doctor; no one even to say their name aloud.

There is a way for many children and young adults to avoid the terrible fate of slipping through the cracks: adoption. An adoptive parent gives these children a place to call their home. An adoptive parent can offer guidance and support when it is needed most. An adoptive parent can give these young adults a helping hand to rely on, a kind word and loving smile to show how proud they are when their kids succeed.

Family & Youth Initiative strives to build a community of volunteers and prospective adoptive parents in order to find permanent homes for children at risk of aging out of foster care without a support system. This is accomplished by focusing on a smaller target group of hard to place children. Over time these children build a relationship with adults at events planned throughout the city, the final goal being that cultivation of relationships will lead to adoption. Since its inception in 2010, *Family & Youth Initiative* has assisted in the adoption of thirteen older children in foster care.

Family & Youth Initiative is a great example of innovative local programming which can be promoted by state and local government in order to reach their goals of increased adoptions. The *Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008* was created to build these types of programs. Due to their more focused nature, programs such as *Family & Youth Initiative* can be very effective at placing children and young adults who might otherwise age out of foster care into loving homes.

Due to the focused nature of this type of program, the amount of effort and therefore the amount of funding required is higher than other programs. This type of program is an example of the importance of maintaining the funding initiatives of the *Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008*. Regulatory steps are also a necessary consideration. Steps must be taken to insure that federal funding meant to improve adoption programs at the state level is used as intended. Increased funding used effectively results in increased availability of focused programming, leading to increased rates of adoption among difficult to place children and young adults.

While progress has been made, there are still thousands of children across the country in need of homes. It is our duty as a society to protect and nurture those among us who are at risk through no fault of their own. These young men and women need our commitment and our resolve to find someone they can call family.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Attribution:

Susan Punnett

Executive Director of Family & Youth Initiative

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Testimony of Debbie Riley

Executive Director of the Center for Adoption Support and Education

U.S. House Committee on Ways and Means, Subcommittee on Human Resources Hearing on Increasing Adoptions from Foster Care and the Adoption Incentives Program

February 27, 2013

I appreciate this opportunity to submit written testimony for the Hearing on Increasing Adoptions from Foster Care and the Adoption Incentives Program held on February 27, 2013. My name is Debbie Riley, LCMFT, and I am the Executive Director of the Center for Adoption Support and Education (C.A.S.E.) which has a long history working closely with the Dave Thomas Foundation on Adoption and now with the Wendy's Wonderful Kids Program.

I want to highlight a very important national initiative entitled Training for Adoption Competency (TAC) that our organization has been leading since 2008. With the support of major national foundations – the Freddie Mac Foundation, the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption, the WW Kellogg Foundation, and the Annie E. Casey Foundation – C.A.S.E. has developed an evidence-informed standardized 78-hour training and case consultation program for licensed mental health professionals. The training is specifically designed to provide agency-based and community-based clinicians with the knowledge, values and skills that are essential in providing adoption-competent mental health services. In fact, we currently have integrated our Training for Adoption Competency curriculum into five of the national Wendy's Wonderful Kids (WWK) sites. As Rita Soronen testified, the impact evaluation showed that children served by the WWK Child Focused Recruitment Model are 1.7 times more likely to be adopted than those not served by the program and that the impact of the WWK program on adoption outcomes is strongest among older youth and those with mental health disorders.

Research shows that children with traumatic experiences of abuse, neglect and abandonment and challenging behavioral and emotional responses are at high risk of presenting with adjustment problems within their adoptive families. These children's emotional challenges, by virtue of the complex trauma that they have experienced, are often significant, and adoptive parents often identify these issues as the primary contributors to family stressors post-adoption. Research shows that these factors are associated with poor adoption outcomes, including the dissolution of adoptions and children's return to foster care. Access to adoption-competent mental health services is a critical factor in promoting positive outcomes for these children and their adoptive families and the success of their adoptions. Adoptive families often express their need for

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adoption competent mental health professionals to assist them, and the challenges they experience in actually finding such skilled mental health professionals.

The Training for Adoption Competency (TAC) curriculum was developed and pilot-tested in 2009. It is currently being implemented in seven sites across the United States (Northern California, Nebraska, Indiana, Minnesota, Missouri, Massachusetts, and North Carolina). A rigorous evaluation has been conducted throughout the implementation of the TAC, beginning with the pilot test at the University of Maryland School of Social Work. Among the findings from the evaluation are the following: (1) on pre-/post-training tests that compare the performance of TAC students to comparably qualified professionals not enrolled in the training, TAC students scored an average 31.29 points higher on post-tests than the control group; (2) all TAC completers to date report change in at least two of six defined aspects of practice with 54 percent reporting change in all six aspects; (3) nearly one-half of TAC completers report changes in practices at the organizational level such as strengthened intake protocols, adding parent and youth support/education groups to services offered, and creation of post-adoption specialist positions within agencies; and (4) trainees report that their assessments have been greatly strengthened, their awareness of the effects and implications of trauma and brain development issues has been heightened, and that they have modified interventions employed, with much greater emphasis on grief, loss and attachment.

In order to expand access to adoption competent mental health professionals by foster and adoptive families, C.A.S.E. believes that the TAC should be taken to scale and provided to clinicians across the United States. First, C.A.S.E. is advocating that the Administration for Children and Families provide clear guidance to state agencies on allowable use of Title IV-E funds. The Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 recognized the importance of a quality workforce to children's well-being and the role of training in developing and sustaining a qualified workforce. Under section 474 (a)(3)(B) of the Act, federal financial participation is available at 75 percent "...for the short-term training of current or prospective foster or adoptive parents and the members of the staff of State-licensed or State-approved child care institutions providing care to foster and adopted children receiving assistance under this part, in ways that increase the ability of such current or prospective parents, staff members, and institutions to provide support and assistance to foster and adopted children, whether incurred directly by the State or by contract." At this point in time, few states have expanded their training programs under Title IV-E to private agency staff. We are not aware of a single state that has extended its training program to the clinicians who prepare children in foster care for adoption or provide clinical post-adoption services to strengthen and stabilize adoptive families. We believe that the Fostering Connections Act provides a vital opportunity to reach the very clinicians who are essential to the well-being of adoptive families. We are eager to work with ACF in supporting states in utilizing available federal resources to train adoption competent mental health professionals.

Second, C.A.S.E. urges Congress, in collaboration with the Administration for Children and Families, to prioritize resources for post-adoption services with a specific focus on addressing the clinical needs of children adopted from the foster care system and their adoptive families. The replication of TAC nationally can promote a responsive, accessible adoption competent workforce of mental health professionals. As the field is increasingly looking to identify and implement evidence-based and evidence-informed services, we encourage Congress and the

Administration for Children and Families to support the implementation of programs such as the TAC in preparing clinicians to provide quality mental health services for children and youth who are adopted from foster care and their adoptive families.

Third, we encourage the Administration for Children and Families to support the TAC curriculum through its existing programs. C.A.S.E. has developed the TAC independently, solely with private funding, and yet it has significant untapped potential for the federal child welfare system and is in fact benefiting families today both inside and outside the child welfare system. For example, we would encourage use of the Adoption Assistance and Guardianship Assistance funds for the TAC curriculum. We also encourage Congress and ACF to hold States accountable for providing quality supports for adoptive families by requiring States to report on the extent to which they make available to adoptive families adoption competent mental health services. The Administration recognized in its FY 2013 budget the need to build capacity in child welfare and mental health systems to ensure the availability of effective interventions. Effective interventions will be available to adopted children and their families only when there are well-trained mental health providers in community based settings.

I look forward to the opportunity to share with the Committee more information on the TAC and its growing evidence base, particularly as this Committee looks to reauthorize the Adoption Incentives and the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) programs. Like the Center on Law and Social Policy (CLASP), we recognize the importance of cross training child welfare and TANF case managers. I hope that these reauthorizations could provide an opportunity for us to explore with the Committee ways to expand the TAC, so that it impacts more communities and, most importantly, larger numbers of adoptive families who struggle to find adoption competent clinicians.

We believe that broadening the reach of the TAC and expanding community capacity to serve adoptive families with adoption competent mental health services will significantly impact the well-being of families, promote adoptions from the foster care system nationwide, and reduce rates of adoption disruption and dissolution.

I appreciate the opportunity to provide this testimony.

Sincerely,



Debbie Riley, LCMFT
The Center for Adoption Support and Education

**Written Statement of
Ellen Kahn
Family Project Director
Human Rights Campaign
to the
Ways and Means Subcommittee on Human Resources
United States House of Representatives
Hearing on Increasing Adoptions from Foster Care
February 27, 2013**

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

My name is Ellen Kahn, and I am the Family Project Director for the Human Rights Campaign, America's largest civil rights organization working to achieve lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) equality. By inspiring and engaging all Americans, HRC strives to end discrimination against LGBT citizens and realize a nation that achieves fundamental fairness and equality for all. On behalf of our over one million members and supporters nationwide, I am honored to submit this statement into the record for this important hearing on increasing adoptions from foster care.

Although we are not able to accurately count the number of LGBT youth in foster care we do know that this population is overrepresented in child welfare, including among the homeless and runaway population. Based on many years of engagement with public child welfare agencies and via direct contact with LGBT youth formerly in care, we know anecdotally that members of this population typically spend longer periods of time in foster care, often have to lie or hide who they are, and endure significant disruptions due to rejection or mistreatment by foster parents. They often do not feel safe in their foster or congregate care situation and report verbal and physical harassment based on their LGBT identity; many homeless and runaway LGBT youth say that they feel safer on the streets than they do in foster care.

While agencies struggle to recruit and retain qualified resource families for *all* children and youth in care, there are fewer known resources for LGBT youth; prospective foster and adoptive parents are not assessed in the pre-licensing process regarding their attitudes and beliefs about LGBT youth nor on their ability to provide a safe, supportive environment for LGBT youth. There is no "screening out" of those families who would reject or otherwise do harm to an LGBT child or teen placed in their home. Not only do we need to better assess and prepare all prospective foster/adoptive parents to support and affirm LGBT youth, but we also need to ensure that all qualified LGBT individuals and couples who wish to foster or adopt are able to do so without facing discrimination or bias. While it is not the case that LGBT foster or adoptive parents are the only resource, or the best resource for LGBT youth, the pool of resource families must include *all* families including those who may be better equipped and more willing

to have an LGBT youth placed in their home; by leaving out qualified LGBT resource families we are missing opportunities to reduce long term care for LGBT youth and all other youth who face the daunting prospect of aging out before achieving a permanent connection.

Since the Human Rights Campaign Foundation launched our All Children—All Families initiative in 2007, over 60 agencies charged with achieving permanency for children and youth in foster care have partnered with us to put in place LGBT-inclusive policies and practices with the goal of expanding their pool of qualified resource families and improving their practice with LGBT youth and families. Even in the most conservative states and where laws are still ambiguous at best, agency leaders—the experts in the field—are reaching out to HRC to help fill in gaps where federal and state laws fall short, and where bias and discrimination continue to keep out some of the most highly motivated families simply because of their sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression. We provide technical assistance and state of the art LGBT cultural competency training to these agencies as they work toward achieving a seal of recognition for their success in providing the best possible services to LGBT youth and families. (See attached list of agencies).

We know that LGBT foster and adoptive parents are a valuable resource for children and youth in care; we know that more agencies—both public and private—are doing their part to become more welcoming and supportive of LGBT resource families. We know that many agencies are becoming proactive in better serving LGBT youth in care and we appreciate the Department of Health and Human Services' Administration on Children and Families' leadership on promoting well-being for LGBT youth. And we know that prospective LGBT foster/adoptive parents continue to face barriers in their pursuit of becoming licensed resource families and are often overlooked when placement decisions are being made. We know that LGBT youth are often afraid to be out, open and honest due to the fear of being treated poorly by their peers, agency staff, or missing out on the chance for a forever family. We are eager to partner on removing these barriers and look forward to collaborating to achieve the goal of permanency for all children and youth in foster care.

All Children – All Families Participating Agencies

The agencies listed below are participating in the All Children – All Families initiative and are committed to implementing policies and practices that welcome, affirm and support LGBT foster and adoptive parents. This list tracks the agencies' progress toward meeting all the benchmarks of LGBT cultural competency as outlined in the All Children – All Families Promising Practices Guide. For more information, visit www.hrc.org/acaf.

	Agency Name	City	State	Leaders
1	Acadia Adoption Center	Kennebunk	ME	
2	Adopt A Special Kid (AASK)	Oakland	CA	✓
3	Adoption & Counseling Services for Families Inc.	Overland Park	KS	
4	Adoption Connection	San Francisco	CA	
5	Adoption Options	Aurora	CO	✓
6	Adoption Resource Associates	Cambridge	MA	
7	Adoption Resources & Counseling Inc.	Kennesaw	GA	✓
8	Adoption Resources of Wisconsin	Milwaukee	WI	✓
9	Adoptions From The Heart	Wynnewood	PA	✓
10	Adoptions Together	Silver Spring	MD	✓
11	AdoptLink	Los Gatos	CA	
12	Alameda County Social Services Agency	Oakland	CA	✓
13	Amara	Seattle	WA	
14	Anchor House	Trenton	NJ	
15	Apple Grove Foster Care Agency	Las Vegas	NV	
16	Arizona's Children Association	Phoenix	AZ	
17	Aviva Family and Children's Services	Los Angeles	CA	
18	Bellefaire Jewish Children's Bureau	Shaker Heights	OH	
19	Camelot Care Centers Inc.	Itasca	IL	
20	Casey Family Programs	Seattle	WA	
21	The Center for Adoption Support and Education Inc.	Burtonsville	MD	

	Agency Name	City	State	Leaders
22	Chatham County Department of Social Services	Pittboro	NC	
23	Child and Family Services Agency	Washington	DC	
24	Childnet Inc.	Plantation	FL	
25	Children's Home + Aid	Chicago	IL	
26	Choice Network	Columbus	OH	✓
27	Clark County Department of Family Services	Las Vegas	NV	
28	Connecting Hearts Adoption Services (Florida)	Windermere	FL	✓
29	Devereux Arizona	Maricopa, Pima and Cochise Counties	AZ	✓
30	Diakon Adoption and Foster Care	Mechanicsburg	PA	
31	EMQ FamiliesFirst	Campbell	CA	✓
32	Family Builders	Oakland, San Francisco	CA	✓
33	Family Focus Adoption Services	Little Neck	NY	✓
34	Family to Family Adoptions Inc.	Richmond	TX	
35	Five Acres	El Monte	CA	
36	Forever Families Through Adoption Inc.	Rye Brook	NY	✓
37	Fostering Futures	Ypsilanti	MI	✓
38	Friends in Adoption	Middletown Springs	VT	
39	Hands Across The Water	Ann Arbor	MI	✓
40	Hillsborough Kids	Tampa	FL	
41	Hillside Children's Center	Rochester	NY	
42	Holy Family Services	Los Angeles	CA	
43	Independent Adoption Center	Pleasant Hill	CA	✓
44	Institute of Professional Practice	Woodbridge	CT	✓
45	Klingberg Family Centers	New Britain	CT	
46	La Familia Inc.	Albuquerque	NM	

	Agency Name	City	State	Leaders
47	LifeLong Adoption Inc.	Newport Beach	CA	
48	Lighthouse Youth Services	Cincinnati	OH	
49	Little City Foundation	Chicago	IL	✓
50	Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services	Pasadena	CA	✓
51	Lund Family Center	Burlington	VT	✓
52	Lutheran Child and Family Services of Illinois	River Forest	IL	
53	Massachusetts Adoption Resource Exchange	Boston	MA	
54	McKinley Children's Center	San Dimas	CA	✓
55	Midwest Foster Care and Adoption Association (MFCAA)	Independence	MO	✓
56	Nathanson Adoption Services	Charlotte	NC	
57	National Adoption Center	Philadelphia	PA	✓
58	New Jersey Division of Youth and Family Services	Trenton	NJ	✓
59	New York Council on Adoptable Children	New York	NY	✓
60	Our Small World Foster Family Agency	Orange County	CA	
61	Pact, An Adoption Alliance	Oakland	CA	
62	Penny Lane Centers	North Hills	CA	✓
63	Project Patchwork Inc.	St. Petersburg	FL	✓
64	Southern California Foster Family and Adoption Agency	Los Angeles	CA	✓
65	TLC Child and Family Services	Sebastopol	CA	
66	The Village Family Services	North Hollywood	CA	✓
67	Your Adoptive Family	Vashon	WA	

March 13th, 2013

Chairman Dave Reichert
Subcommittee on Human Resources
Committee on Ways and Means
United States House of Representatives
1102 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Ranking Member Lloyd Doggett
Subcommittee on Human Resources
Committee on Ways and Means
United States House of Representatives
1102 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

RE: February 27th Human Resources Subcommittee Hearing on Increasing Adoptions from Foster Care

Dear Chairman Reichert and Ranking Member Doggett:

The undersigned, who represent a diverse coalition of organizations committed to opening more homes to America's foster youth, are pleased to have the opportunity to submit testimony for this hearing on increasing adoptions from foster care. The Every Child Deserves a Family Act is a federal bill that would open more homes to foster youth by prohibiting discrimination in foster care and adoption on the basis of the potential parent's sexual orientation, gender identity, or marital status, and the sexual orientation or gender identity of the child involved.

There are 400,000 children in the U.S. foster care system, 104,000 of whom are waiting to be adopted.¹ Unfortunately, because of the lack of adoptive parents, 26,000 of these children leave foster care each year without ever finding a permanent, loving home.² Youth who age out of care without a safety net are vulnerable to drop-out, homelessness, early parenthood, and incarceration. There is a desperate lack of qualified parents willing to open their homes to foster youth. Meanwhile, there are two million potential lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) parents who would consider adopting from the public system but for state policies, practices, and procedures that prevent them from doing so.³

¹ Foster Care FY2003-FY2011 Entries, Exits, and Numbers of Children In Care on the Last Day of Each Federal Fiscal Year, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children's Bureau, Data current as of July 2012, *available at* <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/cb/entryexit2011.pdf>.

² *Id.*

³ Gary J. Gates, M.V. Lee Badgett, Jennifer Ehrle Macomber and Kate Chambers, "Adoption and Foster Care by Gay and Lesbian Parents in the United States," The Williams Institute and Urban Institute, 2007, *available at* www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/411437_Adoption_Foster_Care.pdf.

Most states are silent on the issue of LGBT people fostering or adopting from foster care. In many of these states, this silence either results in an outright ban on foster care or adoption by same-sex couples or leaves these families vulnerable to the potential biases of individual agencies, child welfare professionals, and family court judges at the local level. Only seven states have policies explicitly prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation in adoption.⁴ California and Rhode Island are the only states to prohibit discrimination in adoption on the basis of gender identity. Six states prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation in foster care.⁵

Meanwhile, some states continue to close doors to children in foster care looking for permanent homes. Until 2010, when a State Appellate Court found the law unconstitutional, Florida banned all lesbians and gay men from adopting, but allowed single lesbians and gay men to serve as foster parents. Arizona and Utah require that preference be given to a “married man and woman” in foster and adoptive placements. This marital preference discriminates against same-sex couples because same-sex marriages are not recognized in Arizona or Utah. Nebraska prohibits cohabiting unmarried couples from becoming foster or adoptive parents. Arkansas had a similar law overturned last year by the state supreme court. North Dakota and Virginia permit state-licensed child-placement agencies to discriminate, based on religious grounds, against children in state care and potential parents, including LGBT children and LGBT parents. These overt, explicit laws are the most extreme examples of discrimination against LGBT potential foster and adoptive parents. Most states’ silence on the issue results in a lack of training and cultural competency for child-welfare agencies, creating hostile atmospheres or a reluctance to recruit LGBT parents.

These negative laws and policies, and the hostile climates they create, do nothing to increase adoptions for foster youth. In fact, these policies are costing the federal and state governments significant resources to keep a child in foster care, rather than moving her to a loving adoptive family. According to a 2007 report by the Williams Institute, if the United States were to ban lesbians and gays from serving as foster parents it would cost the nation anywhere between \$87 - \$130 million per year,⁶ while prohibiting discrimination at the federal level would save the federal government \$17 million in the first year alone.⁷ More than 16,000 same-sex couples (13% of couples raising adopted children) are raising

⁴ California, Maryland, Massachusetts, Nevada, New Jersey, New York, and Rhode Island.

⁵ California, Massachusetts, New Jersey, Oregon, Rhode Island, and Wisconsin.

⁶ *Supra* note 3.

⁷ Federal spending from Title IV-E on fostering and adopting would be reduced by ECDF. In 2009, \$4.5 billion was used to fund 203,000 children in foster care, and \$2.3 billion was used to subsidize 430,000 adoptions from the public system. Therefore, foster care costs the federal government approximately \$22,000 per child while adoption subsidies amounted to approximately \$5,300 per child. The difference in per child cost of fostering (\$22,000) minus per child costs of adoption (\$5,300) is \$16,700 per child. If ECDF was enacted today, 2.94% of adoptions will be to LGB parents, or a total 3,366 adoptions per year (2.94% of 114,506). (*Supra* note 3. According to Brodzinsky, et al., the percent of public adoption agencies who have granted an adoption to LGB parents is 70%. We assume that the pool from which LGB parents adopted their child was only 70% of the total children available for adoption (so 70% of 114,506), or 80,154. The percentage of adoptions to LGB parents in areas that permit LGB adoptions (2,356/80,154) is 2.94%.) Subtract the existing number of LGB adoptions to get the predicted increase in adoptions if LGB restrictions are lifted (3,366-2,356), or approximately 1,000 additional adoptions of children from

an estimated 22,000 adopted children in the US. In total, 1.4% of adopted children with two parents are being raised by same-sex couples. Approximately 2,600 same-sex couples (2% of couples raising foster children) are raising 3,400 foster youth. 1.7 % percent of foster youth living with two parents are being raised by same-sex couples.⁸ LGBT parents are qualified, loving parents and are looking to provide homes for our neediest youth.

The American family comes in various shapes and sizes. Policies restricting the ability of LGBT individuals and couples to foster and adopt children reflect neither the reality of American parenthood, the opinion of the American public, nor the weight of 30 years of social science research showing that the children of lesbians, gay men, bisexual people, and same-sex parents are as healthy and well-adjusted as the children of married opposite-sex couples.⁹ In a country where only one-quarter of families are headed by married opposite-sex parents, it is time for a federal standard that places the focus where it belongs: on the best interest of children in foster care, looking for permanent, loving homes.

The Every Child Deserves a Family Act is a bill that creates a federal standard of nondiscrimination: preventing discrimination in public adoption and foster care on the basis of the potential parents' sexual orientation, gender identity, or marital status. It also prohibits discrimination on the basis of the sexual orientation and gender identity of the child involved. The Administration of Children and Families, within the Department of Health and Human Services, already promotes the recruitment of LGBT foster and adoptive parents, but lacks the mandate to enforce these policies.¹⁰ The Every Child Deserves a Family Act provides this mandate.

We very much appreciate your leadership and proactivity in calling this hearing and look forward to working together to ensure that all of our nation's foster youth can find permanent, loving homes.

the foster care system by LGB parents. Given this methodology, we arrive at our final estimate that assumes if 1,000 additional children move from foster care to adoption each year, the federal government yields a savings of approximately \$16,700 per child or \$16,700,000 per year.

⁸ Gary J. Gates, "LGBT Parenting in the United States," The Williams Institute, UCLA School of Law, 2013, *available at* <http://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/LGBT-Parenting.pdf>.

⁹ A 2002 report by the American Academy of Pediatrics found that: "A growing body of scientific literature demonstrates that children who grow up with 1 or 2 gay and/or lesbian parents fare as well in emotional, cognitive, social, and sexual functioning as do children whose parents are heterosexual. Children's optimal development seems to be influenced more by the nature of the relationships and interactions within the family unit than by the particular structural form it takes." Coparent or Second-Parent Adoption by Same-Sex Parents Committee on Psychosocial Aspects of Child and Family Health Pediatrics 2002; 109:339-340, *available at* <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/109/2/339.full>. See also Child Welfare League of America, Standards of Adoption Excellence (rev. ed. 2000), § 4.7 (applicants should not be assessed based on marital status or sexual orientation); American Psychological Association, "Sexual orientation, parents and children," APA Council of Representatives, July 28 and 30, 2004, *available at* <http://www.apa.org/pi/lgbt/resources/parenting.aspx>.

¹⁰ Information Memorandum, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Questioning Youth in Foster Care, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, April 6, 2011.

For more information, please feel free to reach out to any of our organizations, or contact Emily Hecht-McGowan, Director of Public Policy at Family Equality Council, at ehecht@familyequality.org or 202-496-1285.

Sincerely,

American Civil Liberties Union
Child Welfare League of America
City Families, Inc.
Colorado Coalition of Adoptive Families
Families Like Ours
Family Equality Council
Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network
Global Justice Institute - Metropolitan Community Churches
Human Rights Campaign
Log Cabin Republicans
National Black Justice Coalition
National Center for Lesbian Rights
National Center for Transgender Equality
PROMO Missouri
Reconciling Ministries Network
The Union for Reform Judaism
Voice for Adoption
Women's Alliance for Theology, Ethics and Ritual (WATER)



Statement for the Record

By

Jeff Katz

Executive Director

Listening to Parents

Hearing on Increasing Adoptions from Foster Care

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Congressman Reichert, Members of the Committee. I am pleased to submit this testimony to the Subcommittee on Human Resources of the Committee on Ways and Means. I applaud your interest in exploring ways of increasing the number of adoptions from foster care, including through the Adoption Incentives program.

Listening to Parents was incorporated in October 2009 with a mission to “to increase the number of adoptions of children in foster care through changes in state and federal laws, policies and practices that eliminate unnecessary barriers to adoption.”

We believe, and have documented, that there are far more families actively trying to adopt children from foster care than there are children in need of families. Children wait because of systemic barriers to adoption.

Contrary to our common understanding, there are far, far more Americans wanting to adopt children than there are children available. In fact, prospective adoptive parents outnumber waiting children by a ratio of more than 5 to 1.

In a *Washington Post* editorial on November 5, 2008¹, I drew on the 2002 National Survey of Family Growth,² to compare prospective parents seeking to adopt a child with children available in foster care. At that time, there were 600,000 American women actively trying to adopt a child. The survey asked women about the characteristics they would prefer or accept in a child they adopted. Based on the results:

- 521,400 would adopt an African American child. At the time there were about 41,600 African American children in foster care waiting to be adopted. This implies there were as many as 12.5 prospective parents for each waiting African American child.
- 351,600 would adopt children ages 6 to 12. This implies that there were 7.6 prospective parents for each waiting child in this age group.
- 185,400 would adopt a child age 13 or older. This implies that there were 6 prospective parents for each waiting adolescent.
- 181,800 would adopt a child with a severe disability, and 447,000 would adopt two or more siblings at once.

There are many reasons why, despite there being more families wanting to adopt than

¹ http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2008-11-08/opinions/36841172_1_international-adoptions-adoptive-families-prospective-parents

² The National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG) is a national sample of 7,643 men and women 15 to 44 that gathers information on family life. The data used here are from Cycle 6 of the survey, which was conducted from January 2002 to March 2003. Centers for Disease Control, “Adoption Experiences of Women and Men and Demand for Children to Adopt by Women 18–44 Years of Age in the United States, 2002 (http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/series/sr_23/sr23_027.pdf).

children in need for families, so many children remain unadopted. According to a 2005 Harvard University study, only one in 28 people who initially contacted a child welfare agency actually adopted a child.³ Many cited systemic barriers such as bureaucracy, unresponsive child welfare agencies, and lack of incentives in the system to create adoptions.

In March of 2011, Listening to Parents convened an Executive Session of eighteen experts in adoption and family policy at Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government to study some of the barriers that prevent willing parents from adopting children desperately in need of permanent families. Participants included academics, advocates, government officials, foundation leaders, former frontline caseworkers, and adoptive parents. Some of those experts will testify before this committee. In June, 2012, we released a white paper, titled "Eliminating Barriers to the Adoption of Children in Foster Care"⁴. The paper identifies barriers to adoption and recommends some solutions.

Barriers to Adoption

Barriers to adoption from foster care identified by participants in the Executive Session include:

- Financial *disincentives* for creating interstate adoptions;
- Lack of standardized information about families seeking to adopt and about children waiting to be adopted;
- Insufficient post-adoption support compared to support for youth aging out; and
- Absence of a robust model for creating adoptions, including effective recruitment of adoptive families; appropriate caseloads, training, and supervision for workers; and significant youth involvement.

The Problem of Interstate Adoptions

One of the critical barriers identified by the group is the great difficulty of adopting children from foster care across state lines. The adoption of children from foster care in one state to an adoptive family in another is extremely rare in the United States. As I pointed out in a Washington Post editorial⁵, according to the Department of Health and Human Services, in 2010, Americans adopted just 527 children from foster care across state lines.⁶ To lend perspective, the national weather service estimates that 1,000 Americans are struck by lightning each year.⁷

³ Julie Boatright Wilson, Rob Geen, and Jeff Katz., "Listening to Parents: Overcoming Barriers to the Adoption of Children from Foster Care" (<http://www.hks.harvard.edu/ocpa/pdf/Listening%20to%20Parents.pdf>).

⁴ <http://www.listeningtoparents.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/No-Adoption-Barriers-White-Paper-4-12.pdf>

⁵ http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2012-06-01/opinions/35462622_1_adoptive-families-children-from-other-states-child-abuse

⁶ Calculations of Mary Eschelbach Hansen using the Adoption Files of the Adoption and Foster Care Reporting System, which were made available by the National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY, and have been used with permission.

⁷ http://www.lightningsafety.noaa.gov/ams_lightning_rec.htm

The problem stems from the fact that the United States does not have a national adoption system. Instead, there is a different system in each state, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico. Moreover, some state child welfare systems are administered at the county level. Each jurisdiction has its own criteria for adoption eligibility and process for recruitment, approval, and training of adoptive families. Unfortunately, through the law of unintended consequences, our current system (including the adoption incentives program) has created profound disincentives for states to allow their families to adopt children from other states.

If a Maryland family adopts a Virginia child, Maryland has essentially wasted thousands of dollars to recruit and prepare a family, with no benefit to any Maryland child. In return, Maryland will receive a child who may well have expensive medical and educational needs. To add insult to injury, under the federal Adoption Incentives program, Virginia will likely receive a bonus of up to \$8,000 for placing one of their children in an adoptive family. Maryland will get nothing. Put it all together and each interstate adoption has a “winner” (the state that sends the child) and a “loser” (the state that receives the child).

So each state hoards its own families, greatly limiting matches for children and families across jurisdictions. It is common practice for states to prohibit their families from adopting a child from another state until they have waited at least one year. Ironically, this is particularly true when a family is interested in adopting the very hardest to place children. If an Indiana family is interested in adopting a large sibling group, for instance, the temptation is strong for Indiana to keep them waiting, in case an in-state group becomes available later, instead of matching them immediately with a group just over the border in Chicago. This issue is particularly significant in large metropolitan areas that straddle state lines such as New York City, Philadelphia, and Washington D.C.

Recommendations

The group of national experts that met at Harvard has made the following recommendations to eliminate barriers to adoption.

1. *Reward both sending and receiving states for creating interstate adoptions.* In the current system, the state that sends the child to be adopted in another state enjoys a financial gain while the state that receives the child experiences a financial loss. Congress should change incentives so that both states are rewarded when a child is adopted across state lines.
2. *Establish national standards for home studies and for descriptions of waiting children.* Nationwide use of a standard home study, such as the Structured Analysis Family Evaluation (SAFE), will raise the average quality of home studies. A nationwide standard is also essential for increasing interstate adoptions, since mistrust of data from other jurisdictions is a barrier to adoption. Similarly, national standards for describing and disclosing each waiting child’s experiences and needs are critical, both for the process of matching children and parents and for preparing parents to meet the child’s

needs. Congress should instruct the Department of Health and Human Services to establish these standards.

3. *Eliminate long-term foster care as a goal.* Children with a goal of Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement (APPLA) exit foster care into “living situations” but have no family. “No family” should never be the plan for a child. Congress should create incentives for states to replicate existing effective initiatives for reducing use of APPLA.
4. *Emphasize funding for post-adoption services.* No money is dedicated to post-adoption services while significant funds are set aside for other programs, such as independent living for youth with a goal of APPLA. Children who have been adopted from foster care outnumber those in independent living programs by 10 to 1. Funding for post-adoption services should be increased so that it is *at least equal* to that dedicated to supporting independent living. As use of APPLA is reduced and independent living services are less urgently needed, Congress should reallocate the funds currently used for independent living to post-adoption services.
5. *Encourage development of a robust, comprehensive practice model of adoptions from foster care.* Congress should support the development and use of a model that enhances the primary emphasis on safety with a more nuanced strategy for permanence. An effective model will feature child-specific recruitment, clearly defined roles and responsibilities for workers and supervisors, and youth involvement in collaborative permanency planning. Such a model will facilitate training of frontline social workers and supervisors and will make it possible to develop measures of accountability for outcomes.

Adjusting Adoption Incentives to Eliminate the Barrier to Interstate Adoptions

The clearest way to use the Adoption Incentives program to encourage adoptions across state lines would be to make an interstate adoption eligible for an enhanced incentive payment and require that the sending and receiving state split the incentive. In that way, **both** states benefit when states cooperate to place a child.

Why This Matters- A True Story

For many years I ran an agency in Rhode Island that recruits families to adopt children from the state’s child welfare system. Like many such organizations, we had a waiting child” feature on a local TV station. After a “Tuesday’s Child” spot showing a 7 year old black boy named Justin, I received a call from a woman just over the border in Massachusetts. She was a lawyer. Her husband was a doctor. Both were black. She told me that she and her husband had been considering adoption for several years. They saw Justin on TV. They were moved by his story. They prayed. And they decided that they would adopt this child. In any rational system, I should have been in a state police car racing up Route 95 to get this family- a child’s life was at stake.

But the family never adopted Justin. Rhode Island was not legally able to provide a "home study" to a Massachusetts family. And Massachusetts refused to use precious state resources to prepare a family to adopt a child in another state. Their suggestion was that the couple go through the entire adoption process and, at the end, adopt a Massachusetts child. The couple was horrified. They saw no rational reason why they could not be considered for Justin. So, a family was turned away and a child continued to wait.

I urge this committee to explore ways to adjust the Adoption Incentives Program in ways that would ensure that when a child like Justin is adopted across a state line, the result is as it should be- A child has a family. Parents have a child. And society wins.

Thank you.



Statement for the Record Submitted by:

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Before the:

**United States House Committee on Ways and Means,
Subcommittee on Human Resources**

For the hearing:

Increasing Adoptions from Foster Care
March 13, 2013

Dear Honored Chairman Dave Reichert, Ranking Member Lloyd Doggett and members of the Subcommittee on Human Resources, we are Kelly DeLany, Director of the Northwest Adoption Resource Exchange, and Kendra Morris-Jacobson, Director of Oregon Post Adoption Resource Center & Oregon Adoption Resource Exchange. Together, we thank you sincerely for the opportunity to contribute testimony to this very important topic of increasing adoptions for children in the foster care system who wait for adoptive families.

We would like to narrow our very brief discussion to what we feel are two critical subtopics: 1) helping older foster youth find adoptive families; and 2) post adoption services. We will explore how we feel both relate to adoption incentive funding.

Children Aging Out of Foster Care

Despite the good news that there are fewer children coming into foster care annually, and that younger foster children are continuing to be adopted, the fact that over 26,000 foster children age out of the system each year illustrates an escalating and exponential crisis that must be addressed.

Over a short five year period, 26,000 older youth multiples rapidly to 130,000 young people between the ages of 18 and 22 who statistics show are more than likely to become: homeless, involved with the criminal justice system, unemployed, battling addictions, struggling with mental health issues, experiencing early parenthood, among many other struggles. Is that what we want for our young people? Is this what we want the result of foster care to be? It is hardly what we, as States, as a Nation, can either accept or afford. Foster care is meant to help steer children towards a safer and brighter future, not condemn them towards the probability of the dismal list above. Even our own definition of foster care "Foster care is intended to be a short term solution until a permanent placement can be made." (Dorsey et Al. *Current status and evidence base of training for foster and treatment foster parents*) indicates the contrary.

Adoption incentives, if restructured to target increases in specific areas (i.e. older children) would help states to focus their efforts on the waiting foster children who need it most – those who are at risk of aging out.

Post Adoption Services

A second topic that is often overlooked is the importance of post adoption services. Once foster children are placed with adoptive families, there is the misperception that now "everything will be fine." For some children, fortunately, this is the case. However, the many foster children who have experienced extreme trauma, and/or who have mental health issues, developmental delays, addiction risks, or other types of special needs, will often require support, treatment and advocacy long after they have been adopted. In order to maintain the adoptions and parent these children with specialized needs, their adoptive families require education and support themselves; for some families, extensively so, including kinship caregivers who might be caring for children "by surprise."

For every adoption from foster care, it saves states a minimum net savings of \$143,000 (Barth, et al, 2006); not to mention how much it can cost the state when children are coming back into care when the further trauma of an unsuccessful adoption has occurred. Adoption disruptions and

dissolutions are expensive, let alone the devastating emotional toll they have on already traumatized children, and the families who were trying to help them, reducing the chances that a child can be adopted again, or that a family will be willing to adopt again from foster care. By providing post adoption services in assorted forms (education, consultation, training, support groups, advocacy, networking, connection to resources, adoption-specific mental health therapy, etc.) , states can help families and their adopted children to remain or become healthy and stable, and have a much greater chance at a permanent, successful adoption. Successful adoptions are not only better for children and families, they are better for communities and more cost-effective for states long term.

Conclusion

In essence, adoption incentive monies, if reauthorized and refocused, can go a long way in helping foster children connect with loving, permanent adoptive families – both through helping inspire states to work harder to find adoptive families, particularly for older children or those with higher specialized needs, and in providing post adoption services to ensure the adoptions are truly permanent, but **only if states are held accountable for funneling these funds back into adoptions and post adoption support services.**

Sincerely,

Kendra Morris-Jacobson & Kelly DeLany



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Increasing Adoptions from Foster Care
 February 27, 2013

Hello, Chairman Dave Reichert, Ranking Member Lloyd Doggett and members of the Subcommittee on Human Resources. I am Lisa Mathey, an adoptive parent and advocate for adoptive children and families in Virginia. I am pleased to submit my statement regarding the importance of increasing adoptions for children from living in the foster care system while they wait for a permanent family. Thank you for the opportunity to submit my statement focusing on such an important federal policy.

I am submitting this statement as an effort to increase the focus on the federal level for establishing post-adoption resources and services for families after finalization that will assist them in overcoming the crisis that puts their permanency at risk for disruption. As an adoptive parent advocate, I meet with adopted children and families who struggle every day to find resources that help alleviate the stress they feel as they try to address the child's triggers of past neglect and trauma, and learn how to maintain a healthy permanent family relationship. While there is an established and successful post-adoption resources and services program that provides crisis management, counseling, and support groups in Virginia to all adoptive families, the most difficult obstacle I face as an adoptive parent advocate is finding adoption competent professionals to work with the families to address the many issues that put them at risk for disruption. These issues range from behavioral disorders such as ADHD and PTSD to mental health illnesses and developmental delays caused by abuse, neglect and in-utero exposure to alcohol and drugs.

In many discussions with adoptive parents, I hear time and time again how they must spend several hours in therapy visits educating the professional on how little their own biological and mental health history is part of the cause for the issues that I just mentioned. Having access to an adoption competent professional at the beginning of implementing post-adoption resources and services for the child will increase the family's chances of maintaining permanency; and more importantly, helping the child heal mentally and thrive developmentally in a more appropriate time frame. For that access to become available, local, state and federal funds need to be spent in creating or expanding adoption competent training programs for professionals in all 50 states. One such program is already in existence in Maryland and should be replicated nationally. The Center for Adoption Support and Education (C.A.S.E.), in partnership with the Dave Thomas Foundation, offers the Training for Adoption Competency (TAC) program to mental health and child welfare professionals throughout the United States. This comprehensive training program has grown from six (6) sites in 2012 to ten (10) sites in 2013. This growth of the TAC program shows professionals are interested in becoming adoption competent. Federal policy makers need to support bringing programs such as TAC closer to the professionals who want to become adoption competent and those who can truly benefit from it, the adoptive youth and families.

Increasing the number of adoption competent professionals will in turn increase the availability of quality post-adoption resources and services. More opportunities to develop and deliver adequate support services, with the adoption incentive bonuses that States receive, will increase confidence for those

considering adopting a youth between the ages of 9 and 17; our country's most disadvantaged population for adoption from the foster care system. By offering adoption incentive bonuses for post-adoption resources and services programs to adoptive families, we increase the chances for a youth in this age group to be adopted. These bonuses will provide the prospective adoptive family with the resources, support and skills needed to parent the youth with much greater success than what is occurring now. It will also decrease the wait time for youth to be adopted because the prospective family will be better prepared to address the youth's mental health illness, physical disabilities and/or traumatic past. Prospective parents will feel assured that all the services the child receives while in foster care won't automatically disappear if they proceed to adoption. Knowing such services are available to them in the case a situation arises will provide adoptive families the confidence and knowledge they need to meet some of the challenges that arise when parenting children with a history of abuse, trauma or neglect. We know that some of these challenges arise only once an adoption is finalized and the child starts to feel at ease in a safe and loving environment. However, in my experience, parents are not always equipped to manage some of the behaviors seen as their children try to work through their experiences. This is where adoption competent professionals can play a big role, but as stated previously, there is a lack of such trained individuals. A federal focus on this is needed. This investment in preparation will in turn create a home that will give the youth a chance at a developing a permanent relationship intended to last a lifetime and becoming a self-sufficient and independent adult. It will also relieve the state from spending funds to maintain the youth's foster care placement and related services, or worse a dissolved adoption.

By not increasing the focus on the federal level for establishing post-adoption resources and services from the state to the local foster care systems, prospective and current adoptive families will continue to struggle in providing and maintaining a permanent home and will be left with no other choice but to leave or return the youth to the foster care system until they reach adulthood. Every youth deserves a permanent home and the post-adoption resources and services to stay there.

I would like to thank the Subcommittee for its interest in hearing the public's perspective and experiences for improvements to increase adoptions. I hope you will better understand the importance and need for federal leadership to further the development of post-adoption resources. A federal focus is needed to strengthen families after finalization, to assist these children and families in overcoming some of the challenges - that with proper interventions can mitigate crisis - and help all involved understand the normal stages of adoption and healing. It is my hope you will take into consideration the points I have made in this statement to improve the efforts to increase to post-adoption resources and services throughout the foster care system. In closing, I appreciate the dedication of this Subcommittee to hear from your constituents on such an important federal policy. I look forward to your continued efforts on behalf of children and families.

Respectfully Submitted,

Lisa M. Mathey, MEd

Testimony submitted by Marie Dolfi, LCSW

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For the:

**United States House Committee on Ways and Means,
Subcommittee on Human Resources**

For the hearing:

Increasing Adoptions from Foster Care
February 27, 2013

My name is Marie Dolfi and I am an adoption social worker who has been active in advocating for foster and adoptive children in New York State for over 15 years. While I am on the board of numerous organizations I am submitting this testimony as an independent social worker. Thank you for having this hearing and asking advocates to share their thoughts on increasing the number of adoptions for children in foster care.

I applaud the committee's effort to look at what can be done to decrease the number of children who are in foster care that do not have a permanency goal to return to their birth families. As an advocate I would suggest the committee reframe the question from what incentives can we give the states to reduce the number of children in foster care (more of the same) to the question:

What can we do at the federal level to make more people come forward to adopt children in foster care and be successful families? Then require the states to enact programs and policies that specifically answer that question so more families will come forward to adopt.

There are too many disincentives to adopt children in foster care that past federal incentives did not address with prior well intended programs.

The second part of the question – help families to be successful- is key for two reasons. First would be for the welfare of the child who has already had traumatizing experiences prior to foster care not be further harmed and build loving bonds with their new family. Secondly, if the community sees the families as struggling with children with severe mental health issues (due to the trauma, abuse, neglect, prenatal alcohol and drug exposure they experiences prior to foster care) community members themselves will not want to adopt and have the same severe difficulties for their family.

As someone who has talked to NYS Governor Andrew Cuomo's staff, senior administrators at NYS's Office of Children and Family Services and NYS legislators I believe they have other priorities than to increase adoption from foster care based upon their lack of actions.

- Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) for NYS show 30% of the children who enter foster care 12 & older leave foster care without a family.¹
- NYS is 44th in timeliness of adoptions amongst the states.
- There is an alarming rate of children entering foster care *after* adoption (foster care, private adoption and international adoption)² Caring loving adoptive parents are left with no choice to have their child enter foster care when there are safety issues in the home and the state is not providing services to keep the child in their adoptive family.
- NYS is not spending any savings from the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act on post adoption services. Further, NYS OCFS will not say what they have done with the millions of dollars saved by this act.³

If the Adoption Incentive payments were working to motivated NYS to increase adoptions from foster care the state would have received grants more than 3 out of the last 14 years. To date, the foster children waiting for adoptive families are not a priority for New York State.

So what will increase the likelihood of someone adopting from foster care?

- Post adoption services are an incentive:
 - Children are staying in foster care because they will not be eligible for services after adoption not because of a lack of families^{4 5}

¹ 2009 Children's Right's Report

² Testimony to NYS Human Services Budget Hearing has numbers for NYS. See below hyperlink

³ Testimony to NYS Human Services Budget Hearing has documentation <http://nysccc.org/wp-content/uploads/NYSCCCHuman-ServicesTestimony.pdf>

⁴ New York State Longest Waiting Children, Rosemary Avery

⁵ NYS Bridges to Health Program has dramatically increased children being adopted from foster care. Unfortunately the number of openings for children in this program is severely limited.

- Adoptive families will be seen as successful in their extended families and communities so others will step forward and believe they can successfully adopt too. Not only are community members seeing families struggle with children with severe mental health issues they are seeing NYS take out neglect petitions against parents who request residential treatment and then the state is billing the family \$17,000 a year. This is incredibly harmful and disrespectful to adoptive families. We don't take neglect petitions out on parents whose children need 24 hour care due to developmental disabilities or medical concerns! Residential treatment is a response to needing intensive treatment due to the children's mental health issues caused by experiences prior to adoption not poor parenting on the adoptive parents part. Why would anyone risk having a neglect petition taken out on them?

The benefits of post adoption services for children and their families has been substantially documented.⁶

What will help with recruitment of families?

- 9 out of 10 people drop out of the process to adopt a child from the foster care. Too much emphasis is put on recruitment of families and not enough on helping them manage the cumbersome process of adopting from foster care. The original federal AdoptUsKids initiatives and Adoption Opportunity Grants included awards to organizations to help prospective adoptive parents navigate the foster to adopt system. It is now my understanding that the emphasis is on recruitment not with keeping prospective parents engaged in the adoption process. There have not been any such grant awards in this area in more than 10 years.

⁶ Keeping the Promise: The Critical Need for Post Adoption Services to Enable Children & Families to Succeed, Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute

- Case workers are reluctant to find families for children with severe mental health issues when they know there are no real post adoption services to support the children to be successful in families. Case workers will be more proactive in finding families if they know the child will not lose services after adoption.

I conclude by saying I'm not an expert of past federal incentives and their successfulness. What I can say doing more of the same will probably not bring states to further significantly increase adoptions from foster care.

Mandated statewide post adoption services are needed because:

Love does not fix trauma

Commitment does not remove the emotional scars of abuse and neglect

And

Compassion does not heal a brain that has been damaged by

Prenatal alcohol and drug exposure

Without mandated statewide post adoption services children will remain in foster care because they will lose necessary services (respite, counseling and services for families – support groups, training) upon adoption if the system is not changed.

Respectfully submitted,

Marie Dolfi, LCSW



**Comments for the Record
United States House of Representatives
Committee on Ways and Means
Subcommittee on Human Resources**

**Hearing on Increasing Adoptions from Foster Care
Wednesday, February 20, 2013, 2:00 PM**

By Michael G. Bindner
Center for Fiscal Equity

Chairman Reichert and Ranking Member Doggett, thank you for the opportunity to submit comments on these issues. As always, the Center for Fiscal Equity is available to brief the Subcommittee, individual Members and staff regarding this issue and our approach to it, which we have provided before. We await your invitation to talk.

We write today to urge caution on going too far in encouraging quick adoption. Many children in foster care have been placed there because their families of origin have fallen apart due to drug or alcohol addiction, crimes resulting from such addiction (including violent crimes such as robbery, spousal abuse or murder and prostitution) and mental illness, often with one or both parents deemed by the courts unable to be a fit parent to the child. Economic conditions can also lead to the breakup of families and the use of foster care. While such a litany seems to support quick adoption, we suggest that it need not.

There is an alternative to quick adoption and that is family sponsorship whereby the entire family is sponsored by another family, provided that no one in the fostered family is currently dangerous. Indeed, this happens privately when a sibling takes in relatives during family crises. Turning this into a systematic enterprise, whether trained fostering families are used or families are given a stipend for the extra expenses of food and shelter, will preserve families intact while giving them a time to heal, as healing does eventually happen with the right care.

Trained adoptive families will also help with the crisis of mentally ill adults, many of whom find their mental health care in the community and are instead incarcerated. There must, of course, be safeguards, such as the easy rehospitization in the event of alcohol or drug relapse or non-compliance with medication regimes – and with that hospitalization extending for enough of a term so that the patient is not just stable, but comfortable for a length of time in either sobriety and/or medication regimes. Deinstitutionalization has turned much of the mental health sector into triage designed to stabilize clients on meds and then send them into community services or families before all side effects are managed. Paying for longer stays in improved facilities, possibly even inviting members of the Catholic Health Association to open new hospitals with federal funding, is both more fiscally prudent and more humane than using jails and the foster care system and adoptive to manage human tragedy.

Thank you again for the opportunity to present our comments. Again, we are always available to members, staff and the general public to discuss these issues.

Contact Sheet

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Hearing on Increasing Adoptions from Foster Care
Wednesday, February 20, 2013, 2:00 PM

All submissions must include a list of all clients, persons and/or organizations on whose behalf the witness appears:

This testimony is not submitted on behalf of any client, person or organization other than the Center itself, which is so far unfunded by any donations.



Using Incentive Payments to Recognize Permanency for Children in Foster Care

Comments submitted to the Subcommittee on Human Resources of the Committee on Ways and Means

Submitted by Michael Shaver, Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer

Children's Home + Aid, Chicago Illinois

March 13, 2013

We appreciate this opportunity to share our comments on the importance of incentivizing and recognizing permanency for children in foster care with the Subcommittee on Human Resources of the Committee on Ways and Means.

Since 1883, Children's Home + Aid of Illinois has been providing help, hope and opportunity to children and families in need throughout state. Each year, Children's Home + Aid serves more than 40,000 children and families by helping them overcome obstacles posed by poverty, abuse and neglect. Through a comprehensive array of services, we partner with the state of Illinois and the federal government to reach a diverse population with programming designed to provide help, hope and opportunity.

For more than 30 years, Congress has recognized the importance of using federal financial support as an important lever in promoting the adoption of children from the nation's foster care system. With the authorization of the Adoption Incentives program and the Family Connection Grants program due to expire on September 30, 2013, Congress is presented with an important opportunity to further target the use of federal resources in a way that reinforces a critical outcome for children entering foster care: permanency.

Every child deserves a stable and lasting family life. Children and youth who remain in foster care without achieving permanency through adoption, guardianship or reunification face a broad spectrum of challenges when they age out of the system.¹ These challenges are related to their unmet needs for living independently and their educational deficits, but their challenges also reflect the absence of a safety net typically provided by a family supporting a young person as they make their transition to adulthood. In most families, parents continue to provide emotional and financial support well into young adulthood.² For foster youth, who may be unconnected to family or whose families of origin are frequently unable to provide these supports, unmet needs for further education and independent living skills can have devastating consequences including unemployment, homelessness and an increased likelihood of engaging in high-risk behaviors. The prevalence of these negative outcomes for youth aging out of foster care make achieving permanency for children in foster care a key practice and policy priority.

Given the importance of permanency, we **urge Congress to expand the use of the Adoption Incentives program to recognize and reward child welfare jurisdictions for improving permanency outcomes for children in foster care whether permanency is achieved through adoption, guardianship or reunification.** This reflects both the time-honored notion of permanency for children as well as the emergent trends which are part of today's foster care system, where incentivizing all permanency options can successfully reduce the number of children in foster care.

¹Courtney et al., 2005

²Fingerman, K., Miller, L., Birditt, K., & Zarit, S. (2009). Giving to the good and the needy: Parental support of grown children. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 71, 1220-1233.

Moving in this direction reflects what many states have long recognized: improving the rate at which we connect children with families who can safely and permanently meet their needs outside of foster care should be a key outcome incentivized by the federal government.

The Illinois Example

Over the last two decades, we've learned a great deal about promoting permanency for children who enter foster care. We've also learned that promoting permanency has been one of the most effective strategies for reducing the number of children in the nation's foster care system—an underlying goal of federal efforts around promoting adoption performance. According to data from the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS), the number of children in foster care nationally has dropped more than 25 percent since 2000.³ In Illinois during this same period, the foster care population declined by more than 50 percent⁴—twice the rate of the national decline. This reduction in Illinois foster care numbers resulted from a comprehensive focus on achieving permanency for children dating back to 1998, where all permanency outcomes were recognized and rewarded, not just adoptions.

Since passage of the Adoption and Safe Families Act in 1997, Illinois and other child welfare jurisdictions have well-understood that promoting permanency on all fronts is key to reducing the number of children in foster care. In 2000, Jess McDonald, then director of the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, testified before Congress⁵ on the success of Illinois' Performance-based Contracting model which had dramatically increased permanency for children in care. Under this model, Illinois recognized and rewarded contracted agencies successful in securing permanency for children in foster care through reunification, adoption and guardianship. While this performance turnaround saw Illinois twice recognized (in 1998 and 1999) for the White House's Adoption Excellence award for increasing adoptions, it should be noted that Illinois' success in reducing the number of children in foster care was driven by pursuing permanency through guardianships and reunifications as well as adoptions.

Following in Illinois' example, we urge Congress to expand use of the Adoption Incentives program to more broadly reinforce permanency for children in foster care by recognizing states for improvements in the combined outcomes of reunification, adoption and guardianship.

Kinship guardianship

Thinking broadly about permanency performance for a federally funded incentives program is especially important in light of changes ushered in with passage of the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008. Bolstered by compelling evidence generated from the first round of Title IV-E demonstration waivers (authorized by Congress), states are now permitted to use federal financial participation for providing a kinship guardianship assistance program for a child exiting foster care. Using the incentive program to recognize these important commitments of a permanent home for a child exiting foster care could do much to encourage more states to exercise the option to offer kinship guardianship assistance for qualifying children and caregivers.

Permanency leads to cost savings

These recommendations represent an approach to the current incentive program which reflects the right policy choices in an environment of growing fiscal constraints. Perhaps the best rationale for creating incentives for states that go beyond achieving increases in adoptions is that expanding our success in achieving permanency for children to include reunifications and guardianships is a better spend of the public

³ Administration for Children and Families, Health and Human Services (2012), *Child Welfare Outcomes, 2007-2010: Report to Congress*.

Available at <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/pubs/cwo07-10/cwo07-10.pdf>

⁴ Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (2013), *Budget Briefing FY14*. Available at

<http://www.state.il.us/dcf/docs/Budget%20Book%20FY14%20Final.pdf>

⁵ McDonald, Jess (2000). *Illinois' Performance Contracting in Child Welfare, Testimony before the Government Management, Information and Technology Sub-Committee of the House Committee on Government Reform*. Available at <http://www.state.il.us/dcf/docs/testimony.shtml>

dollar. The cost of a child who leaves foster care for guardianship or adoption is less than if that child remained in care. The greatest savings still are represented by children who leave foster care and are returned home to a parent who has demonstrated their ability to safely care for their children. Passing on this important opportunity to align financial incentives for the states with these important outcomes for children is something we can ill-afford in an environment which calls on government to do the same or more with less.

Measuring success

Finally, our experience in Illinois in using performance to profoundly reduce the number of children in foster care taught us something else critical to changing behavior within a very complex system. Measuring success in raw numbers rather than year over year changes in permanency rates hurts consistent performers while rewarding child welfare systems who delay action. In addition to measuring permanency more broadly by including reunification adoption and guardianship for the Adoption Incentives Program, Congress is urged to explore a more robust methodology for evaluating performance improvements that rely on rates rather than actual numbers. Using rates based upon the combined permanency performance levels the performance environment so that over time, consistent performers can benefit equally with jurisdictions that have not had similar, sustained performance over time.

Conclusion

We fully recognize that there are a number of implementation challenges related to these recommendations which require more discussion and additional analysis. For example, recognizing reunification as a permanency outcome immediately necessitates taking a closer look at a) lengths of stay prior to reunification and b) the stability of a reunification over a specified period of time so that permanency comparisons across child welfare jurisdictions are equally valid when used to determine changes in performance over time. While this is just one example of the kind of challenging questions that will need to be answered to move ahead with a framework which more broadly acknowledges the work of child welfare systems in securing permanency for children, these conversations have significant potential to advance dialogue in both the practice and policy arenas.

The Adoption Incentive program is a compelling example of how the original purpose of the program has been honed over time to better fit the performance climate and expectations of the child welfare system as a whole. The Adoption Promotion Act of 2003 both reset state baselines and added a new incentive payment category for adoptions of children age nine and older based upon research which showed this category of children to be at heightened risk of remaining in foster care. In 2008, the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act again reset state baselines, doubled incentive payments for special needs children under age nine and all children age nine and older, and authorized incentive payments for states increasing the rate of children adopted from foster care. These changes signal an important commitment to ensure both policy and practice reflect the best thinking about how to improve permanency outcomes for children in foster care.



Information, Support and Advocacy for Foster and Adoptive Families

*"No one understands what we face as adoptive parents.
We are often ridiculed and treated as the "bad guy"
rather than our child receiving the much needed help."
-Adoptive Parent"*

Thank you for giving the NYS Citizens' Coalition for Children the opportunity to submit testimony to the Ways and Means Subcommittee on Human Resources in response to the recent hearing on Increasing Adoptions from Foster Care (February 27, 2013).

When a little boy was sent back to Russia by his American adoptive mother last year, many people were incredulous and outraged. Although the vast majority of adoptions (whether private infant adoptions or through the United States or international child welfare systems) work out well – with parents who enjoy their children and children who grow up into happy, functioning adults – some adoptive parents run into overwhelming problems parenting their children.

The research tells us that children who were exposed to drugs or alcohol in-utero, abuse and neglect, lived in orphanages, and were adopted at older ages are more likely to need help, especially through developmental stages in life. Parents tell us that they need help with their children's emotional challenges, which usually manifest themselves as behavioral problems within homes, at school or in society. Sometimes parents get so overwhelmed by children who, have trouble in school, lie, steal, abuse drugs and/or alcohol, act sexually inappropriate or are violent that they reach their breaking point having often exhausted their resources searching for help that they feel forced to place their children in or back into foster care. Adoptive parents adopt because they want to parent a child – when their family falls apart, it is a tragic loss for an already traumatized child and a painful (and humiliating) loss for the parents and remaining siblings as well.

Placing a child into foster care isn't always a willing choice. In New York State, when a child needs temporary institutional care (at a cost of \$80,000/year or more) because they are likely to hurt themselves or others and a parent can't afford the services privately, the Office of Children and Family Services requires the parents to place the child in foster care to access the help. This policy is destructive to keeping families together. This further damages the relationship between the parent and child and costs the State even more money as they pay for administrative and court costs associated with foster care.

In the last few decades, we have learned a lot about how to help families – specialized therapists can help the parents and child develop a bond and teach the parents to deal with challenging behaviors in a constructive, healing way. It is time our federal, state, and local governments invest in the practices we know work and embed them into widespread improved policy and practice, to improve the lives of these children and families. Support groups can give parents perspective and advice from parents who have been there. A few states have implemented services for families – such as Ohio, which provides \$10,000 annually so that the parents of each child who has been adopted can pay for therapy. Or Connecticut which has a statewide hotline number that adoptive parents can call for support, an evaluation of their needs and referrals for services. Others states such as New York have yet to provide statewide services. Even though we know that hundreds of New York children enter foster care each year after adoption for the reasons shared above – torn once again from a family

NYS Citizens' Coalition for Children
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with even more dismal prospects for a happy and functional future. It is estimated that not providing post adoption services costs the State millions of dollars and discourages prospective adoptive parents from making the commitment to adopt children who are waiting in foster care because they aren't prepared or well enough equipped to do it alone.

In 2011, 451 NYS adoptive parents and professionals responded to a NYSCCC survey assessing the needs of NYS adoptive families. Significant problems were noted by participants in accessing services, especially therapists who were knowledgeable about adoption and the impact of abuse and neglect on development. Many of the parents expressed that they felt abandoned at a time when they were desperate for help. It is a tragedy for the child, family and community when parents can't keep their children safely at home. It is also an international embarrassment!

Post adoption services in New York State alone would save more than \$30,000,000 by **increasing the numbers of children who are adopted¹, decreasing the numbers of children who enter or re-enter foster care² and decreasing the number of children who enter residential treatment³.**

We urge the Subcommittee to take a close examination of funding and accessibility of quality post-adoption support services offered to children and families nationally, to ensure increased access and adequate funding is available for such services post-finalization as a way to increase stable healthy adoptions from foster care.

Respectfully submitted,

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¹ The Bridges to Health program (B2H) is a very good example of how when services are provided to children and their families the rate of adoption from foster care to adoption increases. B2H ensures that children with significant medical and psychological needs receive services after an adoption. Data from B2H shows that by providing better supports, the percentage of children with a goal of adoption in NYS increases from 26% to 35.5%. If we provided supports to families adopting children with fewer challenges and assumed the same increase in the percentage of children with a goal of adoption (and the achievement of that goal), \$19,593,930 would be saved each year!

² Children are entering foster care (foster care, international & domestic private adoption) **after** being adopted because they could not be maintained in their families. The federal child welfare reporting system (AFCARS) now requires states to report on whether children in foster care were previously adopted. Although not all NYS counties have complied with this reporting requirement, for the 59.1% of cases where the data was entered, 609 children now in foster care were previously adopted (personal communication with OCFS 12/12/12). An additional, 2050 children NYC children in foster care were previously adopted.

³ One example is the Post Adoption Resource Center (PARC) at Parsons Child and Family Center in Albany serves six surrounding counties. Based on family reports and conservative estimates, 58 families had a child at risk of placement in 2009. However, only six of the children entered a residential treatment center. Post adoption services kept 52 children out of residential care at an annual savings of more \$4 million dollars for only 6 counties – and at a cost of only \$225,000 to operate PARC.

* A quote from an adoptive parent in a recent survey (<http://nysccc.org/adoption/post-adoption-services/postadoptsurvey/>) by the NYS Citizens' Coalition of Children of post adoption services needs of parents and professionals in New York State.



**Hillside Family of Agencies Legislative Recommendations for Removing Barriers to Adoption,
Statement for the Record**

RE: Increasing Adoptions from Foster Care Hearing, February 27, 2013

Celebrating its 175th anniversary in 2012, Hillside Family of Agencies is one of the oldest family and youth non-profit human services organizations in the United States. The organization provides adoption, child welfare, mental health, youth development, special education, developmental disabilities, and juvenile justice services across central and western New York and in Prince George's County, M.D. Last year, Hillside Family of Agencies provided services to 12,636 youth and families in need.

Hillside is committed to the addressing the needs of youth in out of home placement through our work in therapeutic foster care and adoption, as well as our new initiative of Family Finding through the Hillside Institute for Family Connections. Hillside currently operates two child specific recruitment grants, Wendy's Wonderful Kids through the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption and Parent for Every Child, funded by the Children's Bureau. These efforts are paying off in the form of youth reconnecting with biological family and in permanent, safe, loving adoptive families for those youth who cannot return home.

In FY2010, 27,854 children aged out of the child welfare system without the permanency and connection that is so critical to development and long term well-being. The future is grim for those youth; they experience significant risk of educational failure, unplanned pregnancy, substance abuse, unemployment, criminal activity and homelessness. These issues are costly to the youth and costly to society. In addition, for every dollar spent on adoption for a child from foster care yields three dollars in benefits to society.

Research shows that a great number of families are interested in adopting a child through the child welfare system but sadly only one in 28 who contacts a child welfare agency actually adopts a child. Barriers in the system stand in the way of increasing adoption of the more than 100,000 children in foster care today, barriers which could be eliminated through changes in policy and practice. In our experience, those barriers include inaccurate data regarding the whereabouts of children in care, a lack of resources to facilitate visits between youth and prospective adoptive parents, discrimination against different kinds of families based on bias and attitude, workforce engagement issues, and a lengthy and discouraging process in terms of certification, matching and transition planning for youth.

Hillside Family of Agencies supports measures recommended by leading child advocacy organizations such as Voice for Adoption, North American Council on Adoptable Children and New York State Citizen's Coalition for Children to increase adoption and support the long term well-being of youth and families including:

1. **Encouraging interstate adoptions through changes in policy.** Institute a policy whereby interstate adoptions are eligible for an enhanced incentive payment, requiring that the sending and receiving agencies split the incentive bonuses. We are often faced with the impossible dilemma of having a match of a family we have certified with a child in another state then faced with payment for services that in no way cover the costs we incur to supervise the placement through adoption finalization. Additionally, oftentimes, state agencies are unwilling to contract for community-based services that could support the family through the typical challenges associated with adopting an older child.
2. **Create policies that encourage mental health and developmental disabilities systems to focus on the permanency needs of youth in their systems of care.** Many times, these systems seek to keep a young person safe and transition into adult care without connection to non-paid professionals. While the care is usually adequate, the lack of family denies the youth permanent lifetime connections that most of us benefit from. In some of the residential treatment facilities these youth become part of a system, essentially a number, with no one on the outside to love them, to support them, to celebrate or grieve with them.

**Hillside Family of Agencies Legislative Recommendations for Removing Barriers to Adoption,
Statement for the Record**

3. **Eliminate Alternative Planned Permanent Living Arrangement (APPLA) as a permanency option.**
Approximately 20,000-25,000 young people age out of the foster care system each year, many without family or economic support (Allen, M. & Nixon, R., 2000). According to the 2000 Census, nearly 4 million people ages of 25-34 live with their parents due to economic realities--jobs are scarce, and housing is expensive¹. Yet, the child welfare system "graduated" thousands of young people from care with no one person committed to them for a lifetime. As many as 3 in 10 of the nation's homeless adults have a history in foster care (Roman & Wolfe, 1995). These young people are at increased risk of educational failure, substance abuse, early pregnancy and criminal behavior. Clearly, the future is grim for those who age out.

4. **Emphasize funding for post adoption services.** Families who adopt children open their hearts and homes to children who have experienced loss, abandonment, and other traumatic events need support to keep their children and families healthy and intact. For many families, post adoption services are an intervention to a crisis. Families receiving post adoption support through our agency view our service as a lifeline, the one thing that allowed them to keep their family whole and safe. However, post adoption services are greatly limited by lack of resources. There is not one federal funding stream devoted to post adoption services (Title IV-B subpart 2 designates a small percentage that is forced to be split, competing with the important adoption recruitment services). State and local agencies sometimes cobble together funding limited to families who are deemed income-eligible, leaving most out in the cold and program funding unstable. As we work harder and more effectively at placing children and youth with forever families, we have a moral obligation to support those families through the child's growing up years as they natural develop and work through past traumas. To not do so puts families at risk of falling apart, for children to return to care, costing states much more in the long run, and risking further trauma and tragic outcomes for youth. As the numbers of children adopted through the child welfare system continues to grow, and as long as American families continue to adopt abandoned and orphaned children from around the world, the need for a comprehensive array of post adoption services and supports becomes more critical and urgent. States and local governments need federal guidance and direction on the importance of sustaining post-adoption services for children and families.

We believe these efforts will lead to improved outcomes for children who so desperately need families as well as for those families committed to making a difference in the life of a child. On behalf of the more than 100,000 children in foster care in the United States and the families caring for adopted children from foster care, we urge you to consider the recommendations presented before you.

Respectfully Submitted,

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References & Resources:

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