

# ***ADVISORY***

## **FROM THE COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS SUBCOMMITTEE ON HUMAN RESOURCES**

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### **Chairman Reichert Announces Hearing on Letting Kids Be Kids: Balancing Safety with Opportunity for Foster Youth**

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 titled, "Letting Kids Be Kids: Balancing Safety with Opportunity for Foster Youth." The hearing will review recent State efforts to improve the lives of foster youth by eliminating barriers that unnecessarily limit the activities of children in foster care. **The hearing will take place at 9:30 am on Thursday, May 9, 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 Florida, which has recently enacted legislation to improve opportunities for foster youth, as well as other experts in foster care and child welfare. 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:**

In 2011, over [250,000](#) children entered foster care across the country. For these children, entering foster care is a traumatic experience resulting in dramatic changes in their lives. For example, children who enter foster care [often](#) move to a new school where they must make new friends, try to fit in, and begin new efforts to participate in sports and other activities in their new community. These and other changes make it even harder for foster youth to successfully grow and develop.

In recent years, Congress has enacted a series of reforms designed to reduce the number of children in foster care, as well as increase the stability of the lives of youth in care. These recent Federal and State reforms have resulted in more children staying safely in their own homes and more children being adopted instead of languishing in foster care. For children who do enter foster care, several Federal laws have been designed to promote school stability to improve the lives of foster youth. The [Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008](#) sought to ensure that States keep foster youth in the same school whenever possible. The 2013 [Uninterrupted Scholars Act](#) allows child welfare

workers access to educational records of foster youth so children that have to change schools are less likely to fall behind.

Some foster care policies and practices unnecessarily complicate the lives of foster youth. For example, when asked about their experiences in foster care, many current and former foster youth often cite rules that made it hard for them to participate in sports, stay over at a friend's house, get a driver's license, or hold down a part-time job. While these policies and practices are often intended to ensure the youth's safety, such policies can also further isolate foster youth when they are seeking to integrate into a new family, school, and community.

A number of States have taken steps to eliminate overly burdensome requirements and improve the lives of children in foster care. For example, California enacted a law in 2004 giving foster youth the right to participate in age-appropriate activities, while also making changes to State policy to eliminate overly restrictive rules for foster youth and foster parents. In April 2013, [Florida](#) enacted a law to reduce rules and regulations that currently limit the activity of children in foster care. Other States have taken similar actions to examine State policies and make reforms to allow foster youth to be treated more like other kids – including participating in age-appropriate activities like sports, staying over with friends, and getting a driver's license.

In announcing the hearing, Chairman Reichert stated, **“Children in foster care deserve our protection. But they also deserve the same opportunities as other kids. Unfortunately, in the name of safety, foster youth are sometimes kept from participating in everyday activities like playing sports, spending time with friends, and getting a driver's license. A number of States have listened to the concerns of foster youth and made changes to better balance safety with opportunity. As May is National Foster Care Month, now is the perfect time to review this issue, highlight what some States have been doing about it, and determine what else we can do to help foster kids be kids.”**

#### **FOCUS OF THE HEARING:**

The hearing will review policies and practices that limit opportunities for foster youth, as well as review recent State efforts to allow foster parents and foster youth to make reasonable decisions about the youth's participation in everyday events and activities.

#### **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, “Please click here to submit a statement or letter 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 Thursday, May 23, 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 TTD/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/>.