

November 3, 2015

The Honorable Ron Wyden
221 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Lloyd Doggett
2307 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Senator Wyden and Representative Doggett:

As members of the State Policy Advocacy and Reform Center (SPARC), a coalition of organizations committed to improving the safety, health and wellbeing of children and families involved in the child welfare system, we are writing to thank you for your efforts to reform federal foster care funding through the Family Stability and Kinship Care Act (S. 1964/H.R. 3781).

This legislation is aimed at reforming the federal financing of child welfare services and providing for new investments in prevention, intervention and post-permanency. It enhances federal funding available under parts B and E of Title IV to provide for prevention and family services to help keep children safe and supported at home with their parents or other family members, gives states and tribes the flexibility to adapt evidence-based family services to the specific needs of each family, and ensures that states and tribes are held accountable for allocating services in ways that maximize safety, permanency, and well-being for children, while minimizing the prevalence of lengthy foster care placements. We applaud your leadership in proposing new investments in a range of evidence-based and evidence-informed and promising prevention and family services to help keep children and families together and out of the foster care system.

Since the authorization of the very first federal grants for child welfare services in the 1930s, states have made considerable strides in addressing the needs of children and families entering the system, but we need to do more. A critical first step would be to make improvements to the existing child welfare financing structure by creating more flexibility in the use of SSA Title IV-E dollars - the primary source of federal funding for child welfare services. As you know, currently, restrictions in the allowable use of funds result in the larger portion of federal funding being dedicated to foster care. We believe states should be able to directly access Title IV-E funds for investments in a broad continuum of services for children and families, including prevention, early intervention, and post-permanency services. Doing so will ensure that states have the resources they need to adequately care for the countless children and families that walk through their agency doors each day.

Given current child welfare financing constraints, the Family Stability and Kinship Care Act is a “game changer,” offering a critically important new funding source to support states in their efforts to provide a broad array of effective services to vulnerable children and families. It does this by extending Title IV-E funding for time-limited family services for children identified as candidates for foster care or who are in foster care, without regard for the Title IV-E income eligibility requirement.

The bill also increases funding for Title IV-B, Part 2 which although a relatively small funding stream compared to the open-ended entitlement for foster care under SSA Title IV- E - is nevertheless critical for the work of State social service agencies given that it may be used to provide services to children and families in need and helps keep families together. In contrast to the bulk of federal child welfare funding, which is targeted at foster care, IV-B dollars can be used to support prevention efforts, such as reducing the likelihood of removal of children in the first place and promoting timely reunification.

We strongly support such critical investments in both Title IV-E and IV-B, as well as the de-linking of eligibility for these services from the outdated AFDC standard. Thank you for your leadership and commitment to improving the lives of our nation’s most vulnerable children and families.

Sincerely,

Advocates for Children and Youth (Maryland)

Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families

Center for Public Policy Priorities (Texas)

Child and Family Policy Center (Iowa)

Children's Action Alliance (Arizona)

Children's Advocacy Alliance (Nevada)

Children’s Home Society of North Carolina

Children’s Trust of South Carolina

Citizens’ Committee for Children of New York

Connecticut Voices for Children

First Focus Campaign for Children

Florida’s Children First

Good Beginnings Alliance (Hawaii)

Juvenile Law Center (Pennsylvania)

Kentucky Youth Advocates

Massachusetts Law Reform Institute

Michigan's Children
Midwest Foster Care and Adoption Association
Nebraska Appleseed
New Mexico Voices for Children
Partners for Our Children (Washington)
Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children
Public Policy Center of Mississippi
Voices for Alabama's Children
Voices for Children in Nebraska
Voices for Utah Children
Voices for Vermont's Children
Voices for Virginia's Children