

Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act

Improving lives and opportunities for children in foster care

The Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act (H.R. 6893/P.L. 110-351) will help hundreds of thousands of vulnerable children find a safe, loving and permanent home by increasing opportunities for adoption and relative guardianship. It also will improve critical education and health care services for children in foster care and better prepare older youth for adulthood by extending federal support for transition programs to age 21. The act also will offer, for the first time ever, important federal protections and support for many American Indian children.

The Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act will improve the lives and opportunities for children in foster care by addressing several important areas.

The act will help move more children out of foster care and into a safe, permanent home

With relatives

- » **Notice to relatives when children enter care.** This increases opportunities for relatives to step in and care for children who are removed from their parents by ensuring the extended family is notified of the removal.
- » **Kinship Navigator programs.** This provides “Family Connection” grants for Kinship Navigator programs that connect relatives with the critical support and programs they need when caring for the children of a family member.
- » **Subsidized guardianship payments for relatives.** This helps children leave foster care to live permanently with grandparents and other relatives when they cannot return home or be adopted. It provides states federal funds in the form of payments to guardianship families for supporting these children, usually to age 18. In certain circumstances, children may continue to receive guardianship assistance to age 21. The act clarifies that all children who, as of Sept. 30, 2008, were receiving federally supported subsidized guardianship payments through Child Welfare Demonstration (Title IV-E) waivers can continue to receive that assistance. And it clarifies that children who leave foster care after age 16 for kinship guardianship are eligible for independent living services and education and training vouchers.
- » **Licensing standards for relatives.** This clarifies that states may waive non-safety related licensing standards for relatives on a case-by-case basis. It also requires the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to report to Congress on the use of licensing waivers and on recommendations for increasing the percentage of relative foster family homes that are licensed.

With adoptive families

- » **Incentives for adoption.** This increases state incentives to find adoptive families for children in foster care, especially older youth and children with special needs.
- » **Adoption assistance.** This increases opportunities for more children with special needs to receive federally supported adoption assistance without regard to income of the birth family.

With birth families and other relatives

- » **Establishes Family Connection grants.** This increases resources for Kinship Navigator programs, as described above. It also provides grants for Family Group Decision Making, Family Finding, and Residential Family-Based Substance Abuse Treatment, all of which can help children stay safely with family members and out of foster care. If the child already is in care, these programs help return that child safely to their parents or other relatives.
- » **Keeping siblings together.** This preserves the sibling bond for children by requiring states to make reasonable efforts to place brothers and sisters together when they must be removed from their parents' home, provided it is in the children's best interests. In the case of separated siblings, states must make reasonable efforts to provide for frequent visits or other interaction, unless it would be harmful to the children.

The act improves healthcare, education and opportunities for children in foster care

- » **Foster care for older youth.** This provides federal support to states that extend foster care services one to three years for young people who turn 18 without a permanent family. This significantly increases the young person's opportunities to successfully transition to adulthood.
- » **Educational stability.** This helps children in foster care, guardianship and adoption to continue their education with as little disruption as possible. It requires states to make sure children placed in foster care can stay in the same school, if possible, or be transferred promptly to a new school, if it is not. The act also provides more federal support for school-related transportation costs.
- » **Healthcare coordination.** This helps improve health care for children in foster care by requiring state child welfare and Medicaid agencies to: better coordinate health care; ensure appropriate screenings, assessments and follow-up treatment; share critical information with appropriate providers; and provide oversight of prescription medications.

The act increases support for American Indian and Alaska Native children

- » **Direct access to federal support for Indian tribes.** This offers, for the first time ever, the same federal foster care and adoption assistance programs and protections to American Indian and Alaska Native children that all other children receive.
- » **Technical assistance and implementation services.** This requires HHS to provide services to improve permanency outcomes for Indian children and their families.

The act improves training for people working with vulnerable children

- » **Extended federal support for training of staff.** This provides more federal support to train people who are caring for and working with children in the child welfare system. This includes relative guardians, staff of private child welfare agencies, court personnel, attorneys, guardian ad litem, and court appointed special advocates.

For further information or for a copy of a more detailed description of H.R. 6893, please contact Beth Davis-Pratt at the Children's Defense Fund at (202) 662-3629 or edavis-pratt@childrensdefense.org or Tiffany Conway at the Center for Law and Social Policy at (202) 906-8026 or tconway@clasp.org

