

The Honorable Danny K. Davis
Chairman
Subcommittee on Worker and Family
Support
Committee on Ways and Means
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Jackie Walorski
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Worker and Family
Support
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U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Davis and Ranking Member Walorski:

We, the undersigned organizations, write to express our strong support for the *Supporting Foster Youth and Families through the Pandemic Act (H.R. 7947)*. As organizations dedicated to the safety and well-being of children, youth and families who are in – or at risk of entering – the child welfare system, we are deeply grateful for your demonstrated leadership and thoughtful response to the urgent needs of these families.

The COVID-19 pandemic is placing unprecedented stress on children, youth, and families as they navigate social distancing, job losses, uncertain childcare arrangements, school closures, social isolation, and significant barriers to many critical support services. While state and local leaders across the country have worked tirelessly to continue vital services for those involved with the child welfare system, the ongoing public health emergency presents new and complex challenges for families and the agencies that serve them.

The *Supporting Foster Youth and Families through the Pandemic Act* presents a bold plan to confront the serious needs of children, youth, and families across the child welfare continuum as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Once enacted, it will provide much-needed resources and tools that support struggling families, keep children safe, and help youth thrive during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Specifically, the *Supporting Foster Youth and Families through the Pandemic Act* would:

- **Provide a \$400 million investment in the John H. Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood to help older youth successfully transition from foster care to adulthood and maintain their health during the pandemic.** Older youth who have made tremendous progress toward successful adulthood, often without the support of family, are seeing that progress upended by the economic impact of the pandemic. The bill will help mitigate the daily challenges facing these young people by providing \$350 million for the Independent Living program and \$50 million for Education and Training Vouchers (ETV), extending Chafee eligibility until age 27, lifting the cap on allowable housing expenditures under the Chafee Program and raising the maximum ETV awards to \$12,000. This bill also keeps more young people connected to supports and safe housing by preventing youth from “aging out” of foster care and allowing youth who have already aged out on their own during the pandemic to re-enter care. Now more than ever, extended foster care is a life line for young people as it provides them with the safety and security of knowing they can maintain their current living arrangements and services and

ensures they will be in the best position to stay healthy and continue working towards their goals for their future.

- **Raise the federal match rate for the Title IV-E Prevention Program to 100 percent.** The COVID-19 pandemic creates many new stressors for vulnerable families and communities need the tools and resources to offer prevention and early intervention services to help families remain safe and healthy. Increasing investment in the Title IV-E Prevention Program builds on important reform efforts already underway across the country and will allow states, tribes, and territories to act swiftly to provide evidence-based, trauma-informed mental health and substance use treatment and in-home skill-based parenting programs to help keep families strong and keep children safely at home with their families.
- **Provide \$85 million for the MaryLee Allen Promoting Safe and Stable Families Program, with \$10 million set aside for Court Improvement Programs.** A targeted investment of federal funds into Title IV-B, Part 2, the MaryLee Allen Promoting Safe and Stable Families Program will give communities the flexibility they need to boost investments in services and programs to support birth, foster, adoptive and kinship families during this challenging time. Court Improvement Program funding will help mitigate the impact of the pandemic on the functioning of the child welfare courts, such as enhancements in technology to ensure timely hearings and avoid delays in reunification and other legal proceedings to achieve permanency.
- **Help relatives caring for children by increasing the federal share for Kinship Navigator Programs.** Grandparents and other relatives who step in to raise children and keep them safely with family and out of foster care, face unique challenges during this COVID crisis. These relative caregivers are often older and are particularly vulnerable to the virus and are struggling to safely access basic food, medicine, and supplies without exposing themselves to the virus. By increasing the federal share for Kinship Navigators to 100 percent and temporarily waiving the evidence standard required for federal reimbursement, this bill creates stronger flexibility to reach more kinship caregivers and provide them with access to resources and information they need to safely care for children.
- **Provide flexibilities for home visiting programs to continue serving families safely.** Allowing for necessary adaptations to ensure that young parents can continue to receive home visiting services will ensure that funding for these vital programs will not be reduced because of measures taken to ensure safety of home visiting staff and clients. Delaying deadlines and providing programmatic flexibility allow home visiting programs to adapt to the public health crisis while safely providing necessary supports to families.

At this critical juncture in Congressional negotiations for the next COVID relief proposal, we appreciate your leadership and commitment to ensuring communities have the resources they need to support vulnerable children, youth and families. As negotiations move forward for the next COVID-19 relief package we strongly urge Congress to include the critical provisions in the

bipartisan *Supporting Foster Youth and Families through the Pandemic Act* so more children, youth, and families have the supports and services they need to remain safe, stable and healthy.

Sincerely,