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**BAUCUS ANNOUNCES MARKUP OF BILLS
TO SUPPORT FOSTER CARE AND ADOPTION,
FIGHT ELDER ABUSE, EXPLOITATION**

Finance Committee set to consider three proposals at Friday business meeting

Washington, DC – Senate Finance Committee Chairman Max Baucus (D-Mont.) announced today that the panel will hold a business meeting on Friday morning to consider three proposals that would support vulnerable children and protect senior citizens. The Committee is slated to consider a Chairman’s Mark of the Improved Adoption Incentives and Relative Guardianship Support Act, originally introduced by Senator Chuck Grassley (R-Iowa), a Chairman’s Mark of the Elder Justice Act, originally introduced by Senators Blanche Lincoln (D – Ark.) and Orrin Hatch (R- Utah), and a Chairman’s Mark of the Patient Safety and Abuse Prevention Act, originally introduced by Senator Herb Kohl (D- Wis.). Baucus said the proposals would strengthen and renew adoption incentives and foster care policies, provide resources to prevent elder abuse, neglect and exploitation, and do more to protect patients receiving care in nursing homes.

“These proposals will benefit hundreds of thousands of America’s most vulnerable children and senior citizens,” said Baucus. **“Boosting adoption incentives, helping families and tribes care for kids, and protecting seniors from abuse are issues all Senators can come together to support. I look forward to considering these proposals in the Finance Committee, and bringing these good policies one step closer to becoming law.”**

The panel will consider the Chairman’s Mark of the Improved Adoption Incentives and Relative Guardianship Support Act, which would extend and increase incentives for adoption, particularly incentives for adoption of children with special needs. The proposal would make it easier for immediate relatives to care for foster kids, and – for the first time – would direct federal assistance to family members, generally grandparents or aunts and uncles, who have been awarded guardianship rights known as relative guardianship. In addition, the proposal would support relative care givers through funding for grants that permit flexibility in licensing standards and that connect relatives to the services they need to care for kids. The Chairman’s Mark adds to the original Grassley proposal; a provision to give Native American tribes the same access to foster care, adoption assistance, and adoption incentives that states currently receive. The Chairman’s Mark would also significantly increase resources available to children aging out of the foster care system to successfully transition into adult life. A summary of the Chairman’s Mark of the Improved Adoption Incentives and Relative Guardianship Support Act can be found on the following pages.

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The Committee will also consider the Chairman's Mark of the Elder Justice Act, which would significantly strengthen prevention, detection, monitoring, and intervention of elder mistreatment, abuse, neglect, and financial exploitation. The Elder Justice proposal will direct federal resources toward projects that will assist families, communities, and states in fighting elder abuse, through programs like training to identify and combat abuse and the creation of a resources database on education and prevention efforts. It will tighten requirements for long-term care facilities to report abuse, and provide additional informational resources for families looking for long-term care options. The proposal will also do more to assist long-term care workers, including bolstering recruitment and supporting continued training.

The Chairman's Mark of the Patient Safety and Abuse Prevention Act will also be considered by the panel on Friday. This bill would expand a successful seven-state pilot program that was part of the Medicare Modernization Act of 2003 (MMA). The Chairman's Mark would build on the current program's record of success by making money available to states nationwide to improve their existing background check infrastructure for employees with direct access to frail elders and individuals with disabilities in long-term care facilities and other settings. These efforts would significantly improve the ability of states to design cost-effective and efficient background check systems that would reduce the risk of elder abuse in the thousands of facilities and other settings where many of the most frail Americans receive health and long-term care.

The markup is scheduled to begin at 9:00 a.m. on Friday, August 1, 2008, in room 215 of the Dirksen Senate Office Building. The Finance Committee has jurisdiction over the Medicare program, grants to States for aid and services to families in need, child welfare services, and adoption assistance. A summary of the Chairman's Mark of the Improved Adoption Incentives and Relative Guardianship Support Act follows here.

Summary of the Chairman's Mark of the Improved Adoption Incentives and Relative Guardianship Support Act

- **Extending and Improving Adoption Incentives:** the bill would reauthorize through 2012 the Adoption Incentives Program, which gives states financial incentives for increasing the number of children who are adopted out of foster care. And, the bill would expand that program to encourage states to improve statistics on successful adoptions by also offering incentives for states when they successfully increase the *rate* of foster child adoptions. The legislation would also significantly boost Federal adoption assistance dollars specifically for adoption of children with special needs.
- **Increasing Tribal Foster Care and Adoption Access:** The legislation would allow Tribes to serve the children in their communities directly with culturally appropriate care and understanding by providing Indian Tribes with the same direct access to federal funding for foster care and adoption services that states currently receive. The bill would allow Native American tribes to claim direct Federal funding for foster care, adoption assistance, and relative guardianship, putting tribal access to federal resources on par with states' access. It would also create grants for states that successfully collaborate with tribes to improve permanency outcomes for Indian children. The legislation would also establish a National Child Welfare Resource Center for Tribes.

- **Keeping More Kids with Relative Guardians:** This bill would help more children to stay in the care of a family member by awarding Federal dollars to states when they move children from foster care to the care of a family member, generally grandparents or aunts and uncles, who have been awarded guardianship rights known as relative guardianship. Federal assistance to relative guardians is not available under current law, but could give families the resources needed to take 15,000 children out of the foster care system for good. The legislation would also provide support to relatives who many times can not meet a state's requirement for licensing for foster care. Because standards that may be inappropriate in a stranger's foster care home may be perfectly fine in a relative's home, such as a situation where two cousins share a bedroom, the proposal establishes a limited demonstration program to determine whether or not relaxing some of these licensing requirements would increase permanency outcomes for children.
- **Supporting Older Children in Foster Care:** The legislation would help foster children aging out of the system successfully transition into adult life by providing resources for them to peruse career interests after they turn 18. The bill would allow states to continue to claim Federal reimbursement for foster care, adoption assistance, and relative guardianship support for all children who are over 18 years old as they age out of the system. The bill would also require states to work with these children to create a transition plan that includes specific options on housing, health insurance, education, local opportunities for mentoring, continuing support services, work force supports, and employment services. The bill would also authorize direct access to Federal Parent Locator Services for State child welfare agencies.
- **Helping Caregivers Reach support and resources** - Nationwide, more than six million children – that is, one in 12 children – are being raised by grandparents or other relatives often called kinship caregivers. The Baucus proposal would establish a competitive grant program to help the grandparents and other relatives get accurate information about and access to the full range of supports available to them.

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