



FIRST FOCUS

MAKING CHILDREN & FAMILIES THE PRIORITY

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May 27, 2008

The Honorable Charles Grassley
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Grassley:

I am writing on behalf of First Focus, a bipartisan advocacy organization committed to making children and their families a priority in federal policy and budget decisions, to thank you for your leadership in introducing the Improved Adoption Incentives and Relative Guardianship Support Act of 2008. We applaud your efforts to improve our existing child welfare system to better care for our most vulnerable children.

The Improved Adoption Incentives and Relative Guardianship Support Act will help promote the adoption of children with special needs by increasing payments to states for such adoptions, and eliminating dated income eligibility requirements in the current Title IV-E Adoption Assistance provision in order to make all children with special needs eligible for federal adoption assistance. The bill also provides critical support for grandparents and other relatives who tirelessly care for children whose parents are not able to care for them by allowing states to receive federal reimbursement for payments to legal relative guardians, and permitting states that adopt the Relative Guardianship option to reinvest unobligated funds from the Adoption Incentive program into services that help children leave foster care for permanent homes with relatives. We are especially pleased that the bill includes these critical Relative Guardianship provisions.

As you know, 6 million children in the U.S. today are living in households headed by a grandparent or other relatives. The Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) reports that nearly a third of all children in foster care live with a relative - often a grandparent. These grandparents typically live in poverty, and struggle to support themselves and their grandchildren. In fact, according to the American Bar Association, over half of kids in kinship care live in families with incomes below 200% of the federal poverty line. These relatives are also more likely to be over 50 years of age and to experience health problems.

Despite enduring clear hardships, relative caregivers typically do not receive the same financial assistance, services, supports and training as foster parents. We believe that the Improved Adoption Incentives and Relative Guardianship Support Act is critical to ensuring that the growing number of relative caregivers in this country have access to adequate resources and much needed support to care for children in need.

We are grateful for your leadership on this issue, and indeed for all of your efforts to ensure that our existing system of care protects children and adequately meets the needs of families in the child welfare system. We look forward to working with you on this and other proposals to address the needs of our nation's most vulnerable children.

Sincerely,

Bruce Lesley