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Contact: Sean Neary/Meaghan Smith
(202) 224-4515

BAUCUS LOOKS FOR WAYS TO IMPROVE FOSTER CARE, BETTER EQUIP FOSTER CHILDREN FOR ADULTHOOD

Finance Chairman: Every child in America deserves to grow up in a safe, loving home

WASHINGTON – At a Senate Finance Committee hearing today, Chairman Max Baucus (D-Mont.) said Congress must work to improve the foster care system, connect more foster kids with family members and adoptive parents, and better prepare foster kids for adulthood. Senator Baucus said the Finance Committee will be working to extend two critical grant programs this year: family connection grants, which are used to reconnect children with their families whenever possible; and adoption incentives programs, which reward states for increasing the number of children adopted out of foster care.

“We have made great strides to improve the lives of foster kids, but more must be done,” Senator Baucus said. **“We must do more to prepare foster kids for the reality of adulthood. And we must do more to reconnect foster kids with family members or establish a permanent connection with a positive role model. As the nation and Congress debate big policies, we can never forget the impact each home has on a small child. Every child in America deserves to grow up in a safe, loving home.”**

Senator Baucus said the committee should build on recent progress modernizing the foster care system. In 2002, more than 530,000 children lived in foster care across the nation. By 2011, that number dropped by more than 27 percent - to just over 400,000. The number of children nationwide awaiting adoption has also dropped from more than 130,000 in 2007 to 104,000 today.

Much of that progress is attributable to two significant pieces of legislation Senator Baucus and the Finance Committee passed to strengthen the nation’s foster care system.

The first of the two, the Fostering Connections Act, created the family connection grants and extended and expanded adoption incentive programs to help connect children with family members and promote guardianship and adoption. The law also provides an option to keep kids in foster care up to age 21, expanded opportunities for tribes to run their own programs, and improved coordination of health care systems.

The second, the Child and Family Services Innovation and Improvement Act, gave states more flexibility and opportunity and eased federal restrictions to promote innovations in child welfare. In exchange for the flexibility, states had to improve safety standards, prevent child abuse and reduce foster care re-entry rates.

Senator Baucus said that in addition to extending the two critical grant programs, Congress must work to find new ways to prepare foster kids for adulthood to cut down on the number that fall into homelessness at age 18.

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