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Hatch Statement at Finance Hearing on Foster Care Group Homes

WASHINGTON – Senate Finance Committee Chairman Orrin Hatch (R-Utah) today issued the following statement during a committee hearing examining how Congress can best address the challenges facing foster children in group homes:

As my colleagues know, last year, Congress passed and the President signed important legislation that improved the adoption incentives program, updated child support enforcement, and made a number of significant reforms to our nation’s child welfare system.

A number of these reforms addressed issues associated with the sexual trafficking of children and youth out of foster care. These provisions were first introduced in legislation that I drafted, the Improving Outcomes for Youth at Risk for Sex Trafficking, which I referred to as I.O. Youth.

I am very pleased that key provisions in my bill are now the law of the land.

But our work to improve outcomes for youth at risk of being trafficked for sex remains incomplete.

Groups home, sometimes referred to as “congregate care,” are literally breeding grounds for the sexual exploitation of children and youth. As the committee heard during a hearing on domestic sex trafficking of children and youth in foster care, traffickers know where these group homes are and target the children placed in them for exploitation.

While the provisions included in my bill will help improve outcomes for children and youth in foster care, a key feature of that bill – which was not enacted – would refocus federal priorities on connecting vulnerable youth with caring, permanent families. This would be accomplished by eliminating the federal match to group homes for very young children and, after a defined period of time, for older youth.

I know that some might have concerns about limiting federal funds for any type of placement. Here's how I look at it: No one would support allowing states to use federal taxpayer dollars to buy cigarettes for foster youth. In my view, continuing to use these scarce tax payer dollars to fund long terms placements in groups homes is ultimately just as destructive.

As Chairman, I will be working with Ranking Member Wyden and other members of this committee to come to a consensus on reducing the reliance on group homes. I hope we can put together draft legislation within the next few months.

I realize that in crafting the committee bill, members will bring their own priorities to the table. I want to encourage all Senators on the committee to do so.

The Ranking Member has recently introduced legislating that would promote the practice of intervening to keep children and youth safely at home before a difficult situation escalates and the child needs to be removed. I hope to work with the Ranking Member on his proposal as part of this exercise.

Additionally, we will attempt to address policies and practices that, as detailed in a BuzzFeed Media series, led to a number of horrific cases of severe abuse, neglect, and the tragic death of a little three year girl.

In order to inform the committee's work on how to address the policies and practices that contributed these horrific outcomes, Ranking Member Wyden and I wrote a letter to all 50 Governors requesting responses to a series of questions related to the oversight of private child welfare service providers.

I look forward to receiving answers to our inquiry and moving forward on this matter.

This hearing is an important first step in making progress on a number of key policy initiatives.

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