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## **BAUCUS, HATCH, DAVIS, DOGGETT UNVEIL LEGISLATION TO IMPROVE, EXTEND CHILD WELFARE PROGRAMS**

*Committee Leaders' Legislation Would Provide Assistance to At-Risk Children, Families*

**Washington, DC** – Senate Finance Committee Chairman Max Baucus (D-Mont.), Ranking Member Orrin Hatch (R-Utah), House Ways and Means Subcommittee on Human Resources Chairman Geoff Davis (R-Ky.) and Ranking Member Lloyd Doggett (D-Texas) today unveiled legislation, The Child and Family Services Improvement and Innovation Act, to provide assistance to at-risk families, youth and foster children by improving and extending key child welfare programs. The bill would extend the Promoting Safe and Stable Families and Child Welfare Services programs, and it would reauthorize the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to allow states to use federal foster care funds to test innovative, new child welfare programs.

**“Enhancing our child welfare programs will have the profound effect of improving the lives of thousands of kids,”** Baucus said. **“Child welfare waivers capitalize on innovative new programs that accommodate the needs of at-risk kids and avoid disrupting children at home whenever possible. This legislation moves us closer to comprehensive child welfare reform and the goal of giving all children homes that are as secure and healthy as possible.”**

**“This legislation empowers states with the flexibility they need to keep families together and ensure that even the most vulnerable children have a safe and secure living environment,”** Hatch said. **“By not adding to the deficit, this bill provides a fiscally sound approach towards identifying solutions to many of the problems plaguing the child welfare system today.”**

**“The goal of these programs is to keep families together, while ensuring that children are protected from harm,”** Davis said. **“Today’s bipartisan legislation also renews an effort to improve our child welfare programs by allowing for innovative approaches to preventing children from being unnecessarily placed in foster care. The past success of these programs are a prime example of how working together with our State partners can yield better outcomes for children and families, while not increasing spending or adding to the federal deficit.”**

**“This important legislation will permit continued help in addressing the gap between those children who are surrounded by loving and supportive families, and those who are not. As one expert testified at our recent hearing on child abuse, every six hours of every day, a child is reported to have died from abuse or neglect in the United States,”** said Ranking Member Doggett.

The Promoting Safe and Stable Families program provides families who are at risk or in crisis with various support systems, prevents unnecessary foster placements or, when necessary, ensures permanency for children by placing them with family members, reuniting them with parents or finding alternative permanent living arrangements. Similarly, the Child Welfare Services program is designed to keep families together and avoid unnecessarily removing children from their homes.

The child welfare waiver program began in 1994, when Congress gave HHS the authority to approve state-based foster care demonstration projects so they could use federal funding to implement innovative new programs that improved on traditional foster care. However, HHS's authority to approve new child welfare waivers expired in 2006. There are currently waivers in seven states that remain active under short-term extensions, but the legislation announced today will give HHS the authority to award a new round of waiver approvals each year for a period of five years.

A full summary of the legislation follows here:

## **Summary of The Child and Family Services Improvement and Innovation Act of 2011**

### **Bipartisan**

The Child and Family Services Improvement and Innovation Act is the product of an agreement between the Chairmen and the Ranking Members of Senate Finance Committee and the House Ways and Means Subcommittee on Human Resources. The legislation builds on a bill introduced by Chairman Davis and Ranking Member Doggett and legislation introduced by Chairman Baucus, Ranking Member Hatch and a number of Democratic and Republican Senators.

The Child and Family Services Improvement and Innovation Act is fiscally responsible, improves state accountability and increases state flexibility.

### **Improved State Accountability**

The Child and Family Services Improvement and Innovation Act includes several provisions dealing with the improper use of psychotropic drugs and the educational stability of children and youth in foster care that will provide greater transparency and increase state accountability in their use of limited federal dollars.

The Child and Family Services Improvement and Innovation Act also promotes increased caseworker visits and support for families struggling with drug and alcohol abuse.

### **Increased State Flexibility**

While increasing accountability, The Child and Family Services Improvement and Innovation Act increases state flexibility. For several years, states have been asking the federal government for relief from stringent and arbitrary federal restrictions on federal foster care dollars.

The Child and Family Services Improvement and Innovation Act allows states to get relief from federal restrictions in order to implement innovative improvements designed to keep families safely together and improve outcomes for children and youth in foster care.

### **Fiscally Responsible**

By folding in funding for effective court improvement programs into the baseline of the bill, The Child and Family Services Improvement and Innovation Act ensures that scarce federal resources are targeted to programs that are the most effective.

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