

FINANCE COMMITTEE QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD

CHAIRMAN WYDEN

Hearing on the nominations of:

Robert Gordon, *for HHS Assistant Secretary for Financial Resources*
January Contreras, *for HHS Assistant Secretary for Children & Families*
Rebecca Jones Gaston, *for HHS Commissioner for Children, Youth & Families*

February 9, 2022

For Ms. Contreras and Ms. Jones Gaston:

Question 1: Mental Health

One cross-cutting issue the Finance Committee is looking into is mental health. This week, we hosted the Surgeon General to hear specifically about his recent advisory on youth mental health. This is going to be a major priority for the Committee moving forward, both in terms of continuing to implement the Family First Prevention Services Act and looking forward to the reauthorization of Title IV-B child welfare programs by the end of this Congress.

Can you both address how you will prioritize youth mental health needs in your work implementing Family First, and within the Title IV-B programs?

Are there other initiatives focused on youth mental health you plan to implement?

Answer from Ms. Jones Gaston: If confirmed, I am committed to moving our child welfare system from a system of placing children outside of the home to one that focuses on prevention and family well-being. A family well-being system is only possible if we address the mental health and well-being of parents, caregivers, and children. I would focus on swift implementation of the Family First Prevention Services Act and supporting more states to submit successful plans that can fully take advantage of the law's focus on parental well-being. In addition, I would look forward to working with you on the reauthorization of IV-B and a deeper focus on evidenced-based prevention strategies.

**United States Senate Committee on Finance
Subcommittee on Fiscal Responsibility and Economic Growth
Hearing to “Consider the Nominations of Robert Michael Gordon, of the District of
Columbia, to be an Assistant Secretary of Health and Human Services, January Contreras,
of Arizona, to be Assistant Secretary for Family Support, Department of Health and
Human Services, and Rebecca E. Jones Gaston, of Oregon, to be Commissioner on
Children, Youth, and Families, Department of Health and Human Services”
February 09, 2022**

Question for the Record for Ms. Rebecca Jones Gaston

Senator Cantwell

Question 1

One of the harsh realities that the COVID-19 pandemic exposed is the lack of affordable child care options in the United States. During the pandemic, parents, mostly women, were forced to balance online learning, their own jobs, taking care of their children, and many other tasks.

This has led to women quitting the workforce in unprecedented numbers during the pandemic so that they can take care of the needs of their families. According to the National Women’s Law Center, women in the United States have lost more than 5.4 million net jobs since February, 2020.

In Washington state and many other parts of the country, child care was already difficult to find even before COVID-19. Some parents end up having to place their children on waitlists while others can’t find any affordable or available options.

It is estimated that the average cost of licensed infant care can consume about 20 percent of an average Washington family’s income. The child care industry in my home state is also facing high staff turnover caused by low wages and other concerns.

The lack of child care does not just take a toll on women and families, but also on the economy. I have supported legislation to provide tax credits for working families who may need help paying the cost of child care. I was also pleased to see that the House-passed Build Back Better Act included a \$100 billion investment to support high quality child care.

We must explore more options to improve child care access in the United States to make families’ lives easier, and also to help with the social and economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

In your opinion, what are the main causes of the child care shortage today? How has COVID-19 made the situation worse?

If confirmed, how would you work to improve affordable child care access through your respective roles? What approach would you take to fix this issue?

Answer: A stable child care sector is essential for both the healthy development of children and the ability of parents to fully participate in the workforce. While child care would not be under my direct purview if confirmed as Commissioner, this issue greatly affects the children and families who ACYF supports, and I would look forward to supporting ACF and Congressional efforts on this issue where possible.

Senator Casey Questions for the Record

Senate Finance Committee Nominations Hearing, February 9, 2022

Question for Rebecca Jones Gaston re: CAPTA:

I have long supported CAPTA's so-called "plans of safe care," which Congress created as a tool to support infants whose parents or caregivers are affected by substance use disorder and to prevent these infants from being placed into foster care if they may safely remain with their families. I am engaged in ongoing discussions with constituents, stakeholders and policy-makers in Congress and the Administration about how we can continue to strengthen this vital support for vulnerable infants, and I would like to ask for your commitment to join those conversations and help us make plans of safe care the best tool they can be to protect infants.

- **How will you work on this issue?**

Answer: If confirmed, I am committed to moving our child welfare system toward a family well-being system. The Plans of Safe Care provisions within the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act provide an important tool to bring together a care team to help support a family struggling with substance use disorder and provide the necessary services to keep a child safe and keep the family together. I have worked extensively on plans of safe care in both Maryland and Oregon and, if confirmed, I would look forward to working closely with you and other partners on this this issue.

Questions for the Record of Senator Sheldon Whitehouse
Nomination of Robert Gordon, January Contreras, and Rebecca Jones Gaston
Senate Committee on Finance
February 9, 2022

Questions for January Contreras and Rebecca Gaston

How can the Administration for Children and Families work to improve housing stability for families and young adults living in unstable or unsafe housing or who are homeless?

Answer from Ms. Jones Gaston: All families and young people deserve the security of having a safe place to call home. ACF plays a significant role in providing services to children and families experiencing homelessness. If confirmed, I commit to working within ACF, and with partner agencies such as the Department of Housing and Urban Development and other partners, to ensure our most vulnerable children, youth, and families, including those experiencing homelessness, are supported.

Do you agree it is important to embed a focus on diversity, cultural competency, and equity in the programs administered by ACF? How will you incorporate these metrics into your evaluations of programs administered by ACF?

Answer from Ms. Jones Gaston: As you know, the Biden-Harris Administration and Secretary Becerra are committed to advancing equity and support for underserved communities, as reflected in the Executive Order the President signed on his first day in office, “Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government.” If confirmed, I will strive to advance this goal in all ACF’s work. The Children’s Bureau, for example, reviews states’ child welfare practices through its Child and Family Services Reviews. I intend to explore how to use this and other vehicles at our disposal to assist states in assessing and addressing equity issues in their child welfare systems. I would also work to advance ACF’s recent Information Memorandum, Equity in Action: Prioritizing and Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities, which outlines ACF’s unequivocal commitment to address disparities.

What is your position on increasing flexibility for States to provide benefits youth and young adults under the Chafee Foster Care for Successful Transition to Adulthood Program? What is your position on extending benefits to young adults exiting foster care as was provided through the Division X of the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021? Do you see this initiative as requiring additional funding?

Answer from Ms. Jones Gaston: The supports offered by the Chafee program for older foster youth and those transitioning out of care can be the difference between former foster youth going to college or getting a job and youth ending up without a roof over their heads. The increased resources and flexibilities Congress provided have been critical and, if confirmed, I would work to examine what worked among those flexibilities and hear from those young people about their experiences.

If confirmed how will you expand the list of evidence based programs that qualify for reimbursement under the Family First Prevention Act (Title IV E) program?

Answer from Ms. Jones Gaston: If confirmed, I will work to ensure that the Title IV-E Prevention Services Clearinghouse has adequate resources to be able to review and rate programs in a timely manner. I believe this must include programs that are focused specifically on serving historically underserved communities. I will also support the continued development of evidence-based practices through support of quality evaluation.

Are there any additional wraparound services that the federal government should provide to support families where a parent has a SUD?

Answer from Ms. Jones Gaston: If confirmed, I will work across ACF programs and with other entities within HHS, including SAMHSA, to support families impacted by substance use disorder. In addition, I am committed to fully implementing the Family First Prevention Services Act to deliver evidence-based supports to more parents struggling with substance use disorder.

If confirmed, what steps would you take to provide parents with the tools to protect their children from counterfeit pills and other narcotics?

Answer from Ms. Jones Gaston: If confirmed, I will work with other Operating Divisions within the Department, including FDA, SAMHSA, and the CDC, to counteract the impacts of illicit drug use on the children and families ACYF serves.

QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD

Senator Cortez Masto

Hearing to Consider the Nominations of Robert Michael Gordon, of the District of Columbia, to be an Assistant Secretary of Health and Human Services, January Contreras, of Arizona, to be Assistant Secretary for Family Support, Department of Health and Human Services, and Rebecca E. Jones Gaston, of Oregon, to be Commissioner on Children, Youth, and Families, Department of Health and Human Services

February 9, 2022

Senate Finance Committee

Questions for January Contreras and Rebecca Jones Gaston

Local jurisdictions are working hard to get Families First programs off the ground. So many of the challenges they face don't need a statutory change, but rather willing agency partners. **Will you commit to working with those states and counties to ensure that the Administration is doing everything possible to support a smooth implementation process?**

Answer from Ms. Jones Gaston: If confirmed, successful implementation of the Family First Prevention Services Act will be a top priority. This law represents a unique opportunity to reorient our child welfare system toward prevention and family well-being. I am committed to working with states, counties, tribes, and other partners to provide the guidance and technical assistance needed for all communities to benefit from this law.

Recently, the Finance Committee heard from Dr. Vivek Murthy, the US Surgeon General, about the children's mental health crisis. **What do you see as your role in addressing kids' mental health needs? Based on your previous experience, where can we do better in breaking down silos between federal programs and arming you with the resources you'll need?**

Answer from Ms. Jones Gaston: The Family First law and upcoming reauthorization of Title IV-B provide many opportunities to address the mental health needs of young people and families involved in the child welfare system. If confirmed, my priority will be to move our child welfare system toward a system of family well-being that focuses on keeping families together.

Question to Rebecca Jones Gaston

Child welfare programs are seeing increases in cases where children have very acute social and behavioral challenges. These cases require intensive services that are often not available in a home setting. In Nevada, Clark County is facing a crisis in finding facilities to provide the necessary treatment for them. This lack of providers too often has resulted in kids spending time in inappropriate care settings while they wait for treatment. **What can the federal government do to partner with counties to ensure that these children and their families receive the intensive services they need and deserve in the most clinically appropriate treatment setting?**

Answer: As we increase our focus on keeping families together, it is possible that the children who end up in out-of-home placements will have acute and specialized needs. I believe that our

goal should be to provide children with the care they need when they need it and in the most appropriate setting to deliver that care. If confirmed, I will work to address the needs of all children involved in the child welfare system.

Questions for the Record - Senator Warren
Hearing to Consider the Nominations of Robert Michael Gordon, of the District of Columbia, to be an Assistant Secretary of Health and Human Services, January Contreras, of Arizona, to be Assistant Secretary for Family Support, Department of Health and Human Services, and Rebecca E. Jones Gaston, of Oregon, to be Commissioner on Children, Youth, and Families, Department of Health and Human Services
February 9, 2022

For Ms. Rebecca Gaston

Tribal nations provide critical child welfare services and adjudicate child welfare matters. However, as they attempt to exercise their sovereignty to protect tribal families, they often face barriers to accessing federal funding and are subjected to policies that interfere with their ability to establish effective programs.

It is up the utmost importance that the federal government protect tribal sovereignty and advance tribal self-determination. And as President Biden stated in a Presidential Memorandum, “History demonstrates that we best serve Native American people when Tribal governments are empowered to lead their communities, and when Federal officials speak with and listen to Tribal leaders in formulating Federal policy that affects Tribal Nations.”

1. How do you believe the federal government could remove barriers to federal funding and other barriers that interfere with tribal nations’ abilities to establish effective programs?

Answer: If confirmed, I would ensure that ACYF remains strongly committed to working in partnership with tribes, tribal organizations, and urban Indian organizations. The Biden-Harris Administration is committed to regular, meaningful, and robust consultation and collaboration, and at ACYF, I would work to ensure ACYF respects the unique government-to-government relationship that exists between the U.S. Federal government and tribal governments. If confirmed, I look forward to working with tribal leaders on identifying barriers that limit access to federal funding and other resources and working collaboratively to identify and implement solutions that remove those barriers.

The federal government has a trust responsibility to protect American Indian and Alaska Native children, and as the Senate stated in a resolution it adopted (S.Res. 707, 115th Congress), tribal nations have the inherent sovereign authority to be involved in child welfare decisions. Today, numerous tribal nations are developing promising child abuse prevention strategies that are reducing the risk of child abuse and helping children stay safely at home rather than being placed in foster care.

2. There are nine federally recognized tribal nations in Oregon. How did you support tribal child welfare programs through your position as Child Welfare Director of Oregon Department of Human Services?

Answer: In Oregon I worked closely with tribal governments and tribal leaders to improve delivery of child welfare services and ensure we were supporting them in a culturally competent manner that accounted for their unique needs. Recognizing the sovereignty of tribal governments and establishing relationships based on transparency and accountability were critical to this work and if confirmed, I am committed to bringing that same focus to ACYF.

3. How would you support tribal welfare programs if you are confirmed as ACYF Commissioner?

Answer: If confirmed, I will listen to the needs of tribes and look forward to providing robust technical assistance and support that recognizes the unique needs of tribes while respecting the government-to-government relationship. In Oregon, I have worked closely with the nine federally recognized tribes to increase access to prevention services, keep families together, and deliver services in a culturally competent manner.

Ranking Member Mike Crapo
Questions for the Record
February 11, 2022

Rebecca Jones Gaston

According to the Adoption Foster Care Analysis Reporting system, the foster care system has served over 600,000 children each year for the past ten years. For many states, faith based organizations provide the majority of child welfare services to these foster children. In order to best prioritize the well-being and safety of this vulnerable population, the federal government must continue to collaborate and support a wide variety organizations dedicated to providing these services.

- **Can you please speak to the important role that faith-based providers play in the child welfare system?**

Answer: I have closely worked with faith-based providers throughout my career and firmly believe that when it comes to the well-being of children, we need everyone at the table. Faith-based providers are a critical part of the child welfare system and, if confirmed, I would work closely with the faith sector.

- **If confirmed, how will you communicate and collaborate with faith-based organizations and providers, so they can continue to help serve this vulnerable community?**

Answer: As I have in Oregon, I would seek to collaborate with the faith-based sector, listening to their needs and ideas to better serve children and families. It is important that ACYF provides clear guidance to all partners, including faith-based organizations. If confirmed, you have my commitment to partnering with and working closely with faith-based organizations.

**Senator John Cornyn
Senate Finance Committee
Nominations Hearing – Gordon/Contreras/Jones Gaston**

Foster Youth

To Jones Gaston and Contreras

Ms. Contreras and Jones Gaston – you both will be charged with carrying out policies impacting foster youth. These individuals are among the most vulnerable Americans, and we need to make sure the foster care system works for them, not the other way around.

Sadly, we have thousands of children in the foster care system who go missing each year. In 2019, there were a total of 423,997 children in foster care. Of that population, about 1 percent or 4,115 children were designated as “runaway.” Some foster care advocacy groups do not think these data on runaways are accurate as some cases are preemptively closed out, even though many of those children are likely to return. However, the data is not conclusive and remains incomplete.

Fortunately, the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) will soon be updated to more accurately reflect where a child stands in the foster care system. I plan on sending the administration a letter regarding this change and how we can get this up and running as soon as possible. I am also working on draft legislation to create a feedback loop from states to ACF, which will provide technical assistance at the Children’s Bureau to update best practices on preventing and mitigating runaway episodes as well as caring for missing and runaway foster youth.

- **How do you plan to address the issue of missing and runaway foster youth?**

Answer from Ms. Jones Gaston: I strongly believe in the importance of data and evidence in driving decisions in the child welfare system and doing what is in the best interests of children. If confirmed, I am looking forward to working with you to continue to ensure that AFCARS is collecting and reporting data that will help us to keep children safe and move us toward a system of child and family well-being. It is critical that we both account for children who have left their placements and understand why they have left so we can provide the support they need to stay safe. You have my commitment to work on this issue with you.

- **If confirmed, will you prioritize accelerating the update to AFCARS and provide Congress with periodical progress reports?**

Answer from Ms. Jones Gaston: If confirmed, I commit to keeping you and the committee up to date about all programs within ACYF. I understand the critical importance of AFCARS and would look forward to working closely with you on all needed updates to the system.

UNITED STATES SENATE COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

Hearing to Consider the Nominations of Robert Michael Gordon, of the District of Columbia, to be an Assistant Secretary of Health and Human Services, January Contreras, of Arizona, to be Assistant Secretary for Family Support, Department of Health and Human Services, and Rebecca E. Jones Gaston, of Oregon, to be Commissioner on Children, Youth, and Families, Department of Health and Human Services

Senator Richard Burr, Questions for the Record

Question for Rebecca Jones Gaston, nominee to be Commissioner on Children, Youth, and Families, Department of Health and Human Services,

1. If you are confirmed you will play a key role in the development of federal policy related to youth in the child welfare system.

Senator Feinstein and I have introduced a bill to ensure that foster children placed in qualified residential treatment programs, or QRTPs, with more than sixteen beds would not lose eligibility for Medicaid because of an antiquated law often called the ‘IMD exclusion.’

QRTPs are required by law to have a trauma-informed treatment model designed to address the clinical needs of foster children with serious emotional or behavioral issues. In other words, these programs are legally required to provide a clinically-appropriate level of care for vulnerable foster children who are in serious need of such care.

Do you believe that children receiving treatment in QRTPs should lose their Medicaid coverage if that QRTP has more than 16 beds?

Answer: If confirmed, my priority will be to ensure that ACYF is doing everything to ensure that all children receive the care they need, when they need it, and in the setting that is best able to provide that care. In Oregon, I have worked closely with the state Medicaid agency to support providers in implementing and understanding the Family First Prevention Services Act and other policies where Medicaid and child welfare intersect. If confirmed, I would continue that collaboration at the federal level with an eye toward getting clear and comprehensive guidance to states, counties, and providers, and working to solve any barriers that prevent children from receiving the best care and support possible.

Rebecca E. Jones Gaston

In December, Congressman Ralph Norman and I led a letter with 102 of our colleagues regarding the rescission of waivers from faith-based providers in South Carolina, Texas, and Michigan. Miracle Hill in South Carolina had their waiver revoked. This is a shame, especially since Miracle Hill does important work to recruit foster families in accordance with their religious beliefs and place children in need of a home in their care. To further this point, studies suggest that 82 percent of families cited faith or church support as a factor that facilitated successful fostering.

- 1. Ms. Gaston – If confirmed, will you commit to protecting religious adoption and foster care providers by ensuring they are able fully participate in the adoption and foster care systems without violating their religious exercise?**
- 2. Ms. Gaston – If confirmed, will you commit to reinstating the waiver to Miracle Hill and South Carolina in order to ensure that this organization can continue their critical work of finding children a home?**
 - If not, will I at least receive a written response to the 20 questions that were posed by Members of Congress in the letter?**
 - Additionally, if Miracle Hill's waiver is not reinstated, can you explain why the Supreme Court in *Fulton v. City of Philadelphia* unanimously concluded that faith-based child welfare providers should be able to provide adoption and foster care services in accordance with their beliefs, but the Biden Administration is choosing to ignore this important decision from our nation's highest court?**
- 3. Ms. Gaston – If confirmed, when discrepancies arise, will you commit to consulting career professionals in the Conscience and Religious Freedom Division before taking action with regard to cases involving religious institutions or providers?**

Answer to Questions 5-7: I have closely worked with faith-based providers throughout my career and firmly believe that when it comes to the well-being of children, we need everyone at the table. Faith-based providers are a critical part of the child welfare system and, if confirmed, I would work closely with the faith sector.

If confirmed, I will follow the law. I deeply respect the oversight function of Congress and this Committee. I am committed to ensuring that the Department is responsive to oversight requests, like your letter, and provides Congress with the information that it needs consistent with appropriate law and regulation.

If confirmed, I will work with the career subject matter experts within ACYF and the Department to come to the best decisions possible for the children and families ACYF is entrusted with serving.

Senator Bill Cassidy – QFR for 2/9/22 Nominations Hearing

For Rebecca E. Jones Gaston, Commissioner on Children, Youth and Families at HHS:

1. The passage of the Family First Prevention Services Act in 2018 brought numerous opportunities for states and tribes to access federal resources to safely support families, in lieu of unnecessary family disruption and placement in foster care. There also are considerable avenues through Medicaid to support these types of services. State, tribes, and numerous stakeholders have elevated the need for better coordination and communication among the agencies in HHS – namely CMS and ACF. It's been years, and still these challenges exist. **In your role as the ACYF Commissioner should you be confirmed, how will you move this effort forward to provide meaningful, responsive information to jurisdictions to ease these challenges?**

Answer: If confirmed, I am committed to listening to states, counties, and providers about challenges and opportunities related to the implementation of the Family First Prevention Services Act, including the Qualified Residential Treatment Program provisions. Given the complex interactions with Medicaid, I am committed to working with CMS and other parts of the Department to provide clear and responsive guidance to the field. My top priority will be ensuring that children receive the type of care they need in a setting that is most appropriate to delivery that care. If confirmed, I look forward to working with you on this issue.

Senator James Lankford
Questions for the Record
HHS Nominations Hearing; Robert Gordon, January Contreras, and Rebecca Jones Gaston
February 5, 2022

For both January Contreras and Rebecca Jones Gaston:

Faith-based Child Welfare:

Faith-based child welfare providers perform vital services for hundreds of thousands of foster children nationwide and are often the best at finding forever homes for children in need. According to HHS' AFCARS report, 407,493 children are in foster care, 117,470 of whom are waiting to be adopted.

Unfortunately, one day before the 2021 AFCARS report came out, HHS announced the rescission of waivers that were previously granted to faith-based adoption and foster care agencies in Michigan, Texas, and South Carolina, which put providers in these states in the untenable position of choosing between serving children or operating in accordance with the tenets of their faith.

Earlier this year, the Supreme Court unanimously validated the principle that religious adoption agencies have a right to be free from discriminatory exclusion from adoption and foster care programs because of their beliefs in *Fulton v. Philadelphia*. The Supreme Court found that "the refusal of Philadelphia to contract with Catholic Social Services for the provision of foster care services unless it agrees to certify same-sex couples as foster parents cannot survive strict scrutiny, and violates the First Amendment." However, HHS and the Biden administration appear to be ignoring the Court's clear direction that religious foster care agencies cannot be shut down because of their religious beliefs.

A number of my colleagues and I wrote to Secretary Becerra on this issue last year, but we have yet to receive a response

- 1. Do you agree that our primary goal should be safe, loving, and permanent placements for all children?**

Answer from Ms. Jones Gaston: Yes.

- 2. Do you agree that faith-based adoption and foster care agencies should be able to continue to partner with the government to serve children and families without sacrificing their sincerely held religious beliefs?**

Answer from Ms. Jones Gaston: I have closely worked with faith-based providers throughout my career and firmly believe that when it comes to the well-being of children, we need everyone at the table. Faith-based providers are a critical part of the child welfare system and, if confirmed, I would work closely with the faith sector.

- 3. Do you agree that without faith-based providers, our nation would be unable to properly care for the number of children in need of homes and families?**

Answer from Ms. Jones Gaston: Faith-based providers are absolutely essential to our child welfare system.

- 4. If confirmed, will you commit to maintaining the notice of non-enforcement for the 2016 grants rule and disavow its enforcement moving forward?**

Answer from Ms. Jones Gaston: It is my understanding that this is an issue that spans across the Department. If confirmed, I will look into how the Department is addressing this issue and report back to Congress. I also commit to doing everything in my power as, if confirmed, to ensure that grantees and their beneficiaries are not unfairly discriminated against.

- 5. If confirmed, will HHS exclude from the Title-IV E program religious adoption and foster care providers that cannot assist in the placement of children in same-sex households without violating their religious exercise when those households have alternative providers available to assist them in the state?**

Answer from Ms. Jones Gaston: If confirmed, I am committed to working closely with faith-based providers to ensure that children have the supports they need and in the settings that are best positioned to provide those supports.

Senator Barrasso Questions for the Record
Rebecca Jones Gaston
Nomination Hearing
Wednesday, February 9, 2022
10:00 a.m

Question 1: Faith based organizations play an important role in the child welfare system. The actions of the Biden Administration are making it more difficult for these groups to participate in the process. This continues a troubling pattern of the Department of Health and Human Services discriminating against people and organizations of faith.

- **On November 18, 2021, Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) through the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) and Office for Civil Rights (OCR), announced it was withdrawing waivers previously granted under the Trump Administration. Please explain your position on this decision.**
- **Please describe how you will help faith-based groups participate in the child welfare process and identify previous professional experiences where you have specifically worked with faith-based groups.**
- **Please describe how you will ensure faith-based organizations will not have to violate their own religious beliefs to participate in federal programs.**

Answer: Faith-based providers are critical to the child welfare system. In my current role, I work closely with the faith community and understand how essential they are to our safety net. If confirmed, I look forward to listening to and working closely with faith-based providers, and will follow the law.

Question 2: Rural states and communities face unique challenges when delivering governmental services.

- **Please describe specific instances and experiences where you have improved the delivery of social services in rural communities?**
- **Explain how, if confirmed, you will ensure the policies of the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) will take into account the unique needs of rural states and people.**

Answer: Ensuring equitable access to ACF programs for rural communities is critical. If confirmed, I would partner with rural communities to identify barriers to accessing ACF programs and would be committed to thinking creatively to solve those problems and meet the needs of children and families in rural communities. During my career I have worked with rural communities and have seen firsthand the issues caused by long distances to service providers, lack of reliable internet, and staffing challenges for many providers. I would bring that experience to ACF if I am fortunate enough to be confirmed.

Questions 3:

As the former Chairman of the Senate Indian Affairs Committee, ensuring American Indian and Alaska Native children receive the help and support they need is an important personal priority of mine.

- **Can you please identify previous professional experiences and actions where you worked with tribal communities?**

Answer: While with Casey Family Programs, I was the project lead for the California Disproportionality Project that had teams from 14 counties comprised of Tribes and county staff focused on strategies to reduce disproportionality and disparity of Tribal communities and African American communities. Additionally, in Oregon, the relationship with Tribes has been a priority including ensuring membership of tribes within all the advisory groups, as well as the ICWA advisory. In my current role, I have also supported the passage and implementation of the Oregon Indian Child Welfare Act as well as the implementation efforts of prevention and Family First with the Tribes.

- **Can you please identify specific policies and ways you plan on working with tribal communities if confirmed?**

Answer: If confirmed, I look forward to working with Tribes to support the implementation of prevention and Family First as well as the reduction of the disproportionality and disparity of Tribal families. Upholding the government-to-government relationship is a priority and engaging with Tribal leadership to guide and inform what is needed is the process for which I intend to work.

Question 4:

The Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families (ACF) previously issued a rule entitled “Vaccine and Mask Requirements To Mitigate the Spread of COVID-19 in Head Start Programs.”

- **Do you believe the scientific data supports the masking of young children to participate in Head Start?**
- **If you believe the masking of young children is justified, please provide specific medical or scientific studies to support this position.**

Answer: Head Start is a vital resource to many underserved communities around the country. Many children served by state child welfare systems participate in Head Start. If confirmed, I am committed to working closely with the Office of Head Start to collaborate on ensuring the well-being of children in Head Start centers. While Head Start would not be under my direct purview, if confirmed as Commissioner, I would look forward to supporting ACF and Congressional efforts on this issue where possible, while also following Centers for Disease Control (CDC) guidance for masking.

Question 5:

The COVID-19 pandemic has been particularly difficult on children who lost the ability to attend in-person school. Teachers are classified as mandatory reporters of child abuse and neglect under state law, since they are in such frequent and close contact with children.

- **From a child welfare perspective, can you explain your position on the importance of in-person learning?**

Answer: Schools and the supports that students receive in schools are an essential part of the safety net for children and families. Children do best when they have access to a full range of supports, including those provided by in-person learning.

Question 6:

Human trafficking is a tragedy and must be stopped. The actions of the Biden Administration are only making the situation worse, especially along our southern border. With that being said, the Administration for Children and Families plays an important role combating human trafficking.

- **Can you please identify specific policies you believe Congress should consider that would improve the ability of ACF to combat and provide assistance to victims of human trafficking?**

Answer: A focus of my career has been combatting human trafficking, and I will always carry with me the experiences of clients who have been victims of trafficking. If confirmed, I will work closely with each component of ACF to incorporate anti-trafficking efforts into our programs, particularly in child welfare. In addition, I would listen to survivors about what would have made a difference in their situation, and I would bring those lessons to ACF programs. I would also look to partner with law enforcement. I look forward to working closely with you on this issue.