

June 24, 2013

U.S. House of Representatives
Ways and Means Committee Office
Subcommittee on Human Resources
1102 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Honorable Members of the Subcommittee on Human Resources:

As the Subcommittee considers Adoption Incentives reauthorization legislation with the intent of increasing adoptions from foster care, [the Donaldson Adoption Institute](#) respectfully recommends the funding of post-permanency support and preservation services to achieve that goal. The Adoption Institute is an independent, nonpartisan, nonprofit policy and education organization that conducts research and analysis in order to improve federal and state adoption-related laws, policies and practices. Our "[Keeping the Promise](#)" initiative, for instance, aims to expand an essential tool to enable children in foster care to join permanent, safe and loving families: adoption support and preservation services (ASAP), which not only help sustain adoptions, but can encourage them as well.

Most children adopted from care – because they suffered deprivation, abuse and neglect, multiple placements, and/or emotional conflicts related to loss and maltreatment – come to their new families with elevated risks for developmental, physical, psychological, emotional and/or behavioral challenges. The availability of ASAP services – including parent education, child and parent support, case management, therapeutic counseling/intervention, respite, crisis intervention and residential treatment – has been linked to parents' greater ability and willingness to adopt children from care, and the lack of these services is a barrier to such adoptions. Studies consistently document adoptive families' desire and need for ASAP. The overall body of adoption research has associated receiving ASAP with more positive outcomes; conversely, having unmet service needs is associated with lower perceived parent-child relationship quality and more negative impact on family and marital relationships. Studies indicate the amount and quality of support that child welfare adoptive families receive contribute to permanency and positive adjustment, and providing them early in the placement is linked to better outcomes.

Adoptive families use clinical services at three to five times the rate reported by birth families, and those adopting from care have the highest rate of seeking a range of counseling and mental health services. Studies of children in care consistently find many (ranging from 40-80% across studies) have significant mental health needs. Adopted children also are more likely than their non-adopted peers to score in the clinical range on standardized behavior problem measures. Given the traumatic life experiences these children have endured, a substantial proportion continue to have ongoing emotional and behavioral issues that may intensify as they age, and at least half of their families will seek counseling services.

As the Subcommittee well knows, the 2008 Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act (PL 110-351) gradually eliminates 1996 AFDC income restrictions on federal funding for adoption assistance, thus extending assistance to children who had been covered solely by state and local funding. The Act also requires states to calculate their savings as a result of increased federal investment and to re-invest these savings in child welfare services. With the Child and Family Services Improvement and Innovation Act of 2011 (PL 112- 34), Congress mandated that states document how savings are spent, including on post-adoption services. Despite the fact that there has been limited

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effort by states and HHS to calculate and report savings and reinvestments, the Congressional Budget Office projects that states will save millions of dollars annually and potentially up to \$1.4 billion from 2009-2018 (when the de-link is fully phased in).

The federal government has been extraordinarily successful in promoting adoptions from foster care: In the ten years before the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 (PL 105-89), approximately 211,000 children were adopted; in the most recent 10 years, 525,000 children were adopted – about two and a half times as many. Yet there is no dedicated funding stream for post-adoption services to sustain these hundreds of thousands of families.

Accordingly, to ensure adoption stability, the Adoption Institute recommends that the Subcommittee:

- Require HHS to report to Congress: Title IV-E adoption assistance savings resulting from the 2008 Fostering Connections Act de-link, and the programs that savings are reinvested in and the amounts per program, and
- Mandate that states reinvest a minimum of 20 percent of the total savings annually in adoption support and preservation services.

Allocating subsidy savings to ASAP would retain the intent of states' adoption assistance funding: to encourage parents to adopt children from care and sustain families' permanency. These straight-forward, budget-neutral fixes would be an effective strategy to facilitate permanency for the more than 104,000 children – who are on average 8 years old – waiting in foster care, typically for over three years. Additionally, funding such supports could prevent some of the 26,000 youth from “aging out” of care each year without families.

We hope you will agree that funding adoption support and preservation services is in the best interests of children, families and the nation. Thank you for your attention to this vulnerable group of children and youth who are all too often overlooked. Please feel free to contact us if you would like additional information.

Sincerely,



Adam Pertman
Executive Director
Donaldson Adoption Institute
120 East 38th St., NY 10016
617-332-8944
apertman@adoptioninstitute.org



Ruth McRoy
Board Member
Senior Research Fellow

cc: Ryan Martin, Human Resources Subcommittee Staff
Nicholas Gwyn, Human Resources Subcommittee Minority Staff
MaryLee Allen, Children's Defense Fund
Nicole Dobbins, Voice for Adoption
Joe Kroll, North American Council on Adoptable Children
Kathleen Strottman, Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute