

# THE DONALDSON ADOPTION INSTITUTE

October 7, 2013

The Honorable Max Baucus  
511 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Baucus:

Thank you for inviting stakeholder comments on the Strengthening and Finding Families for Children Act (SAFF-Children Act) discussion draft.

[The Donaldson Adoption Institute](#) is delighted to support the SAFF-Children Act's provisions reauthorizing the Adoption Incentives program, including an award for guardianships; adjusting state payments to reward adoption and guardianship rate improvements; and mandating that states report on adoption assistance/AFDC eligibility delink savings and spending on child welfare and adoption, as well as allocating a percentage of the savings and Incentive awards for post-adoption/post-guardianship services. We are also pleased that Family Connections Grants are extended.

The Adoption Institute is an independent, nonpartisan policy and education nonprofit 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, and remain in, permanent, safe and loving families: adoption support and preservation services.

The Adoption Institute would like to take the opportunity to echo some of Voice for Adoption's recommendations for the SAFF-Children Act:

- Create an incentive for permanency for the oldest youth in foster care with greater awards for adoption or guardianship for youth 14 and older.
- Ensure adoption is ruled out before making awards for guardianships.
- Require a minimum percentage of adoption assistance delink savings (30%), separate from support for children who might otherwise enter foster care, and Adoption Incentives awards (25%) be designated for post-adoption/post-guardianship services, as well as mandate reporting for Adoption Incentive awards.
- Place greater restrictions on the use of long-term foster care as a case plan goal.

While HHS [AFCARS FY2012 data](#) illustrate federal and state progress for some of the most vulnerable American children -- including the decline in those waiting in foster care to be adopted and the increased adoption rate -- over 100,000 children are still waiting for families. These girls and boys are a mean of 7 years old and have been in temporary care for a mean of over two years. Additionally, more than 23,000 youth were "emancipated" from foster care, without any family support, in 2012. These statistics represent the hopes and dreams of children and youth who deserve the benefits, safety and security of forever families. The numbers remind us of the work

that remains to be done to fulfill our obligations to these children; your proposal offers promising policies to do so.

Additionally, the SAFF-Children Act recognizes that post-adoption support services are critical to increase and sustain adoptions, a commitment for which the Adoption Institute is especially grateful. According to the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption 2013 [National Foster Care Adoption Attitudes Survey](#), “those who have considered foster care adoption, and those who have not, see financial-support-related steps as making the biggest difference in the decision to adopt.” Of those who have considered it, from two-thirds (66%) to nearly 85 percent (83%) said that various post-adoption services and supports were “difference-makers” in decisions regarding foster care adoption.

Thank you for your leadership; it is truly a testament to your commitment to the over 100,000 children still waiting in temporary care for permanent families. Please feel free to contact us if you would like additional information.

Sincerely,



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