



November 9, 2021

Dear Members of Congress:

Across our country, there are more than 400,000 children and youth in foster care right now. Foster care is designed as a safe haven to support these children's health, healing and well-being while we work toward reunification, placement with relatives, or other permanency options when necessary.

At the heart of this safe haven is foster families – relatives and non-relatives who step up to provide the nurturing care that every child needs and deserves.

An abundance of research speaks to the healing power of family-based foster care. Unfortunately, our safety net has some holes in it. Holes that children can and do fall through.

Most communities still do not have enough foster families and children in foster care suffer the consequences. The lack of available foster families contributes to poor placement matches, children being separated from siblings, frequent moves, longer stays in foster care, unnecessary placement in group care, and youth aging out on their own.

News headlines regularly report foster parent shortages but don't often delve into the systemic shortcomings that drive turnover and cause individuals to quit fostering or dissuade them from starting the process. Many who are interested in fostering drop out before they ever begin due to frustration from lack of responsiveness to questions and an often-confusing licensing processes. Plus, nearly 40 percent of new foster families stop fostering within the first year, stating concerns over lack of access to supportive services, especially mental health services. Most foster care agencies fail to collect or use data to analyze their foster family capacity or to design better approaches to engaging and partnering with families.

Over the past 18 months the global pandemic has created new challenges. We commend the state and local leaders, front-line staff and families who continue to work together through difficult times. It's as important as ever that we prioritize and help communities recruit and support foster families.

We come together as organizations that represent and advocate alongside foster, kin and adoptive families and youth who have experienced foster care to urge Congress to address long-standing barriers to effective foster parent recruitment and retention. We offer four research-based recommendations that would also advance the important family-centered reforms enacted by the Family First Prevention Services Act.

Recommendation #1

Ensure all foster families have the support they need to provide quality caregiving by requiring child welfare agencies to make a core set of supportive services available to kin and non-kin foster families caring for children in foster care.

Recommendation #2

Spur innovative solutions needed to accelerate the goal of eliminating the inappropriate use of congregate care for children in foster care through a competitive federal grant program.

Recommendation #3

Create a focus on results in 'diligent recruitment plans' by directing foster care agencies to use data-driven approaches to planning and evaluating their progress on their recruiting, training, supporting and retaining kin and non-kin foster families.

Recommendation #4

Create publicly available data to keep policymakers and the public informed about trends nationally and in states relating to family-based care by directing the Department of Health and Human Services produce an annual, national census on foster families, including data and trends on congregate care.

More details about these recommendations are available in this [CHAMPS brief](#) and on the CHAMPS website here: <https://fosteringchamps.org/policy/>

We commend Congress for its long legacy of legislative enactments in support of the safety and well-being of children in foster care. By strengthening family-based care, Congress can spur further improvements for children and families. Indeed, we believe support for family-based care have been overlooked as a key catalyst of child-centered reform and therefore urge action.

We look forward to opportunities to further discuss these recommendations and we thank you for your continued leadership and support.

NATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

Adopt America Network
American Academy of Pediatrics
Bethany Christian Services
CHAMPS Campaign
Creating a Family: Helping adoptive, foster, and kinship families thrive
Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption
FosterClub
National Association of Counsel for Children
National Foster Parent Association
North American Council on Adoptable Children
Partners in Foster Care

ALABAMA

- Alabama Foster & Adoptive Parent Association

ALASKA

- Alaska Center for Resource Families (a project of Northwest Resource Associates)

ARIZONA

- Arizona Association for Foster and Adoptive Parents

CALIFORNIA

- California Alliance of Caregivers
- RaiseAChild

COLORADO

- Colorado CHAMPS
- Foster Source
- Colorado Coalition of Adoptive Families

CONNECTICUT

- Connecticut Alliance of Foster and Adoptive Families, Inc.
- The Children's Community Programs

DELAWARE

- Children & Families First
- A Better Chance for Our Children

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

- Foster and Adoptive Parent Advocacy Center

FLORIDA

- Florida Foster and Adoptive Parent Association
- Florida's Children First

GEORGIA

- The Foster Care Institute

HAWAII

- EPIC 'Ohana

IDAHO

- Idaho Voices for Children

ILLINOIS

- Children's Home & Aid
- Peoria Area Transracial Families

IOWA

- Lutheran Services in Iowa

KANSAS

- Kansas Foster & Adoptive Parent Association
- Foster Adopt Connect

KENTUCKY

- Fostering Futures-Kentucky Foster & Adoptive Care Association
- Kentucky Youth Advocates

MAINE

- Adoptive and Foster Families of Maine, Inc. & The Kinship Program

MARYLAND

- Maryland Resource Parent Association
- Maryland Resource Parent PTA (Parent Teacher Association)

MASSACHUSETTS

- Plummer Youth Promise

MICHIGAN

- Spaulding for Children
- Fostering Forward Michigan

MINNESOTA

- AspireMN
- Family Alternatives

MISSOURI

- FosterAdopt Connect

NEBRASKA

- Nebraska Foster & Adoptive Parent Association
- Renewed Horizon
- Families Forever
- Nebraska Appleseed

NEVADA

- Foster Kinship
- Children's Advocacy Alliance

NEW HAMPSHIRE

- New Hampshire Foster & Adoptive Parent Association

NEW JERSEY

- Embrella

NEW MEXICO

- New Mexico Child First Network

NEW YORK

- Adoptive and Foster Family Coalition of New York
- CHAMPS-NY
- Families Together in New York State
- Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy
- You Gotta Believe
- WRI

NORTH CAROLINA

- Foster Family Alliance of North Carolina

NORTH DAKOTA

- Cass County Human Service Zone

OKLAHOMA

- Circle of Care

OHIO

- Adoption Network Cleveland
- Ohio Children's Alliance

OREGON

- Oregon Post-Adoption Resource Center

PENNSYLVANIA

- Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children
- Together as Adoptive Parents, Inc

RHODE ISLAND

- Rhode Island KIDS COUNT

- Adoption Rhode Island
- Foster Forward

TENNESSEE

- Tennessee, Teresa Crawley [is she with Tennessee Foster Adoptive Care Association]

TEXAS

- Texas Foster Care Association
- TexProtects

VERMONT

- Voices for Vermont's Children
- Formed Families Forward

VIRGINIA

- Voices for Virginia's Children
- Formed Families Forward

WASHINGTON STATE

- Foster Parent Alliance of Washington State

WEST VIRGINIA

- West Virginia Foster, Adoptive and Kinship Parents Network

WISCONSIN

- Coalition for Children Youth and Families, Inc.