

Advocates for Families First

ENHANCING SUPPORT AND ADVOCACY FOR CHILDREN IN KINSHIP, FOSTER, AND ADOPTIVE FAMILIES

Advocates for Families First Moves Ahead with Bold, First Policy Agenda

*Leading National Organizations Stress the Need for Support and Advocate
That Children Live in Kinship, Foster and Adoptive Families*

Washington, D.C. – Advocates for Families First, a national coalition with expertise in child welfare and intergenerational family connections, released its first policy agenda during a June 18 policy briefing on Capitol Hill. Speaking as advocates for strengthening policies on behalf of kinship, foster and adoptive families were Rep. Dave Camp (R-MI), Laura Berntsen representing Sen. Ron Wyden (D-OR), Becky Shipp representing Sen. Orrin Hatch (R-UT), Donna Butts of Generations United, Irene Clements of the National Foster Parent Association, Joe Kroll of the North American Council on Adoptable Children, Karen Poteet of the Oklahoma Department of Human Services who is also an adoptive parent, Catherine Sanders who is a youth currently in foster care, Phyllis Stevens of Together as Adoptive Parents, and Lynn Urvina who is a kinship navigator and a kinship caregiver in Washington State.

“The idea of permanency is so important. We really do need to find a permanent loving home for kids in foster care,” said Dave Camp (R-MI) and chair of the House Ways and Means Committee. “When you look at the data (since the passage of the Adoption and Safe Families Act), time waiting to be adopted has declined by a year since 1997. The bill has been effective, but we can improve upon it with the legislation that is pending.”

Sponsored by the Congressional Caucus on Foster Youth, the briefing outlined a broad policy agenda that includes recommendations focused on:

- Providing kids who have been abused or neglected with permanency in a family setting, whether they return to their birth family or live permanently with another family.
- Prioritizing family care when a child or youth needs to be removed from the birth family.
- Providing caregivers with the preparation and training necessary to meet the needs of children in their homes.
- Ensuring that children and youth have opportunities to participate fully in their case planning, and that caregivers have the right to make decisions for the children in their care.
- Giving children, youth and families the support and services they need to be stable and successful in their lives.

“We are in a unique position to leverage the passion, wisdom and energies of thousands of individuals and hundreds of organizations to truly influence policies and practices that can result in families having the ability to meet the needs of the children in their care,” said Joe Kroll, executive director of the North American Council on Adoptable Children.

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Currently, one in seven children in care – one in three teens – are not living in families, not because of disabilities or needs, but because they have not been connected to a family. Kinship placements are underused across the country, although federal and state policies recognize this as the preferred placement.

“Generations United is honored to be a part of this new partnership that connects the unique voices of kin, foster and adoptive families on behalf of America’s children,” said Donna Butts, executive director of Generations United. “Grandparents and other relatives who step up to raise children who can’t remain with their birth parents save taxpayers more than \$6.5 billion annually by keeping children out of foster care and in loving families.”

Nearly 40 percent of the 102,000 children waiting for a permanent family through adoption will linger in care for longer than three years, even though studies have shown that there are families willing to adopt. More than one in ten of the children in care will experience five or more placements, despite overwhelming evidence that this negatively affects their wellbeing.

“This unique collaboration has been nothing short of amazing! We know that if we take care of the caregivers, the children will flourish,” said Irene Clements, president of the National Foster Parent Association. “Every child deserves to grow up in a family and our hope is to encourage public policy that enables all children who cannot live with their birth parents to succeed into adulthood through living with educated and supported families.

While research shows that family-based care is a predictor of positive outcomes for children and youth in care, families often struggle with inadequate resources, services and supports as they strive to meet their children’s needs. In addition, at every point in the child welfare system, children and families of color are disproportionately represented and affected.

“As a former foster parent, current adoptive parent and an employee of the Oklahoma Department of Human Services, enacting public policies that remove barriers to the placement of children with kinship, foster and adoptive families is extremely important to me,” said Karen Poteet. “Families give of their time, their home, their own financial resources, and their extended families to care for children who are unable to remain with their birth parents. They are the heroes of the child welfare system.”

Advocates for Families First is an alliance of Generations United, the National Foster Parent Association and the North American Council on Adoptable Children. Its mission is to build a unified national movement to support kinship, foster and adoptive families who care for children and youth, promote their healing and help them thrive. Funding is provided through the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption and the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative.

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