

Voice for Adoption

SPEAKING OUT FOR OUR NATION'S WAITING CHILDREN

2015 VFA Advocacy Agenda

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Voice for Adoption focuses our advocacy efforts on improving the lives of the nearly 108,000 children and youth in our nation's foster care system; providing a significant interest on children who are waiting to be adopted and the families who adopt youth from foster care. We believe that every child deserves and needs permanent family relationships. We support all forms of permanency that provide children with true, life-long permanent family connections.

Our Core Advocacy Priorities

- **Making the Adoption Tax Credit Refundable** — VFA urges Congress to reinstate the refundable provision of the adoption tax credit to ensure adopted children and families who do not benefit when it is non-refundable are able to have access.
- **Supporting Post-Adoption Services** — VFA calls for dedicated federal funding for post-adoption services and efforts to promote the availability of adoption-competent mental health providers/services for children and families.
 - VFA urges a reinvestment of 20% of the savings from the adoption assistance de-link (Sect. 402 of P.L. 110-351) into sustaining adoptive families through providing post-adoption services. (*Achieved, Preventing Sex Trafficking & Strengthening Families Act of 2014 P.L. 113-183 – Sec. 206*)
- **Addressing the Least Permanent Case Goal** — VFA believes that every child needs a family, especially before exiting the foster care system. However the permanency case goal “APPLA/OPPLA” (Another/Other Permanent Planned Living Arrangement) leaves a gap in ensuring that young people have appropriate support systems before “aging-out”. VFA urges legislators to thoroughly review this as a permanent case goal for children in foster care by holding Congressional hearings on the subject and requiring a GAO report on state policies and practices. VFA urges Congress to set stricter guidelines to severely limit its use; mandate concurrent permanency plans for children with these case goals; and encourage HHS to establish a national strategy to work with states to decrease the number of children who have a goal of APPLA, to ensure youth are legally connected to a family or individual that is committed to care for them.
 - (*Restrictions to APPLA Achieved, Preventing Sex Trafficking & Strengthening Families Act of 2014 P.L. 113-183 – Sec. 112*).

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- **Reauthorizing the Adoption Incentives Program**— VFA encourages Congress to reauthorize the expiring Adoption Incentive Program and update the baseline to FY2012 data, including a revision of the “older youth” definition to include state bonuses for youth adopted beyond age 18 (for States that have increased the extension of care for these youth). To reduce barriers in interstate adoptions and to reward these efforts VFA supports an enhanced incentive that is split between both sending and receiving states. Any funds remaining at the end of the fiscal year should be reinvested into technical assistance that will promote the adoption of older children awaiting adoption. VFA also calls for Congress to ensure HHS require reports of funding use be submitted by any States that receive federally funded adoption bonuses.
 - *(Reauthorization & improvements Achieved, Preventing Sex Trafficking & Strengthening Families Act of 2014 P.L. 113-183 – Sec. 201-205).*
- **Refocusing the Adoption Opportunities Program** — VFA urges HHS to provide significant grants to the field in the important areas outlined under the program purpose, including funding toward efforts to address post-adoption support and overrepresentation of children and youth of color in foster care. Furthermore, VFA calls for appropriation equal to authorization level (authorization is \$39 million and appropriations have been \$26 million).
- **Protect Funding for Discretionary Adoption Programs** — VFA calls for Congress to remain committed to federal programs that support children and families. VFA specifically supports funding protections for families that adopt children from foster care by protecting discretionary adoption programs such as the Adoption Opportunities Program, Promoting Safe and Stable Families and the Adoption Incentive Program.
- **Opening More Homes to Children** — VFA supports and encourages legislation that breaks down barriers to achieve more adoptive homes for children in foster care through prohibiting discrimination of adoptive and foster parents based on sexual orientation and or marital status. Congress must place the adoption of children above preferences by agencies (receiving federal funds) contracted to serve the 102,000 children and youth waiting to be adopted.
- **Building the Capacity for Permanency Training** — VFA encourages HHS to work with states, the non-profit community, and private entities to maximize the use of Title IV-E training funds to expand the use of evidence-based and evidence-informed child specific recruitment strategies to specifically encourage the adoption of older youth and children with special needs.

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- **Breaking Down Barriers to Interstate Adoptions** — VFA calls for Congress to support funding the interstate placement bonuses at \$10 million to encourage the process to expedite adoptions across state lines. VFA also urges HHS to examine how to better encourage states to collaborate to increase adoptions across states; Congress should reward both sending and receiving states for creating interstate adoptions.
- **Amending the Interethnic Adoption Provisions** — VFA calls for amendments to the Interethnic Adoption Provisions to allow race/ethnicity to be one of the factors considered in permanency planning and in the preparation of families adopting transracially. We also advocate for enforcement of the Multi-Ethnic Placement Act (MEPA) requirement to recruit families who represent the racial and ethnic backgrounds of children in foster care, and provide funding to support such recruitment.