

Voice for Adoption

SPEAKING OUT FOR OUR NATION'S WAITING CHILDREN

2016 VFA Advocacy Agenda

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The Voice for Adoption board of directors has approved this years advocacy agenda. We focus our advocacy efforts on improving the lives of the nearly 108,000 children and youth in our nation's foster care system, with a primary focus on children who are waiting to be adopted and the families who adopt children and youth from foster care. We believe that every child deserves and needs a permanent family. We support all forms of permanency that provide children with true, life-long permanent family connections.

Our Core Advocacy Priorities

• **Supporting Post-Adoption and Post-Guardianship Services** — Too few states and communities offer necessary, comprehensive support services that will ensure that children in adoptive and guardian families have the opportunity to heal and thrive. VFA calls for dedicated federal funding for post-adoption and post-guardianship services—including families who adopted from foster care and internationally—and efforts to promote the availability of adoption-competent child welfare and mental health providers/services for children and families.

- VFA urges Congress to increase the Title IV-B funding designated for post-adoption services.
- VFA urges HHS to track and report how states are investing in post-adoption and post-guardianship services at least 20 percent of the savings from the adoption assistance IV-E de-link (Section 402 of P.L. 110-351).

• **Making the Adoption Tax Credit More Accessible** — Currently, many families—especially those who adopt from foster care—are unable to access the federal adoption tax credit. VFA urges Congress to make the federal adoption tax credit refundable to ensure that all adopted children have the best opportunity to be adopted and that families who have limited federal tax liability can benefit.

- VFA supports The Adoption Tax Credit Refundability Act (S. 950/H.R. 2434)

• **Ensuring All Children and Youth Have a Permanent Case Goal** — The use of the APPLA/OPPLA (Another/Other Permanent Planned Living Arrangement) case goal contributes to young people's aging out of care with no permanent family. VFA applauds recent changes in the 2014 Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act (PL 113-183) to limit the use of APPLA/OPPLA. To ensure youth are legally connected to a family or individual who is committed to care for them, VFA urges

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legislators to continue to thoroughly review APPLA/OPPLA by holding Congressional hearings and requiring a GAO report on state policies and practices.

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- VFA urges Congress and the Administration to provide oversight of the new requirements related to APPLA/OPPLA, under Section 112 of the Strengthening Families Act, and to ensure successful implementation by state child welfare agencies.
- VFA urges Congress to mandate concurrent permanency plans for children with these case goals;
- VFA urges HHS to provide guidance to help states implement restrictions to APPLA and evaluate outcomes resulting from the limitation of its use and encourages HHS to establish a national strategy to decrease the number of children who have a goal of APPLA.

• **Protecting Funding for Discretionary Adoption Programs** — Many states and jurisdictions use a variety of federal funding options to encourage and support adoptions. These discretionary funding streams, including the Adoption Opportunities Program, Promoting Safe and Stable Families and the Adoption Incentive Program, are important resources for ensuring that children and youth have a permanent family and the federal government should continue its investment in these programs.

- VFA supports continued enhancement of the Adoption Incentive Program to ensure it encourages adoption and guardianship placements and provides funding for states to support families post placement. Specifically, we encourage a revision of the “older youth” definition to include bonuses for youth adopted from foster care at age 18 and older. To reward reduced barriers in interstate adoptions, VFA also supports an enhanced incentive that is split between both sending and receiving states. Any incentive funds remaining at the end of the fiscal year should be reinvested into technical assistance that will promote the adoption of older children from foster care. VFA also calls for Congress to ensure HHS require reports of funding use be submitted by any states that receive federally funded adoption bonuses.
- VFA urges HHS to provide significant grants to the field in the important areas outlined under the Adoption Opportunities Program’s purpose, including funding of post-adoption support, recruitment of adoptive families for older youth, and

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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).

- VFA urges continued investment in other federal funding streams used for adoption promotion and support services, including Promoting Safe and Stable Families, and TANF.

• **Increasing Children's Chances of Finding a Permanent Family** — VFA supports breaking down barriers that prevent children and youth in foster care from finding a permanent family by discriminating against prospective parents. We believe that more children can find a permanent family if laws prohibit discrimination against prospective parents based on sexual orientation and/or marital status and support of prospective parents who have disabilities. Congress must place the adoption of children above preferences by federally funded agencies contracted to serve the 108,000 children and youth waiting to be adopted.

- VFA supports the Every Child Deserves a Family Act (H.R. 2449/S.1382)
- VFA supports legislation that ensures individuals with disabilities are encouraged and empowered to be foster and adoptive parents. VFA supports legislation that provides resources to states to better equip social workers and others to develop and support adults with disabilities throughout their foster care and adoption process.

• **Expanding Access to Training to Encourage Permanency** — Restrictions on the use of Title IV-E training funds prevent jurisdictions from replicating successful strategies to promote the adoption of children and youth from foster care. By encouraging training, the federal government can help states can expand the use of best practices across the country.

- VFA encourages HHS and Congress to work with states, the nonprofit community, and private entities to maximize the use of Title IV-E training funds to increase the ability of the child welfare workforce to implement evidence-based and evidence-informed recruitment practices and other strategies that encourage the adoption of older youth and children with disabilities and other challenges that may create barriers to adoption

• **Breaking Down Barriers to Interstate Adoptions** — In many cases, the best placement option for a child may be in another state. Currently, such placements are often quite challenging to complete and can

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significantly delay a child's achieving permanency. VFA believes the federal government has a critical role to play in easing the process of interstate placements.

- 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 when making adoptions across states; Congress should reward both sending and receiving states for creating interstate adoptions.
- VFA supports H.R. 4472 **Modernizing the Interstate Placement of Children in Foster Care Act**

• **Enhancing Children's Access to Their Cultural Identity** — VFA recognizes that race matters to children and youth. Current laws and regulations fail to acknowledge this fact and believes that not enough effort is placed into recruiting families who reflect the racial and ethnic background of children in care.

- 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 who are 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.
- VFA calls for, HHS to rescind policy statements that restrict an agency's ability to prepare parents and children for transracial families, and to implement policies that encourage agencies to prepare children and parents for the unique challenges transracial adoptive families face.

• **Ensuring Access to Original Birth Certificates**— VFA recognizes that adult adoptees have a right to and often a need for more complete information about their birth families.

- VFA supports adoptees' right to information about their birth families and supports access to original birth certificates for all adult adoptees at age of majority.

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• **Supporting the Indian Child Welfare Act** — American Indian and Alaskan Native children have a right to continued and positive contact with their tribe. Such contact is in the child's best interest and AI/AN children should have a right to culturally competent permanency options. VFA recognizes tribal sovereignty and encourages tribes and state and federal governments to collaborate to achieve children's best interests. The federal and state governments should provide tribes with resources to ensure that AI/AN children and their families receive equivalent benefits under laws impacting their safety, permanence, and well-being.

- VFA supports implementation of BIA-2015-0001; Regulations for State Courts and Agencies in Indian Child Custody Proceedings.