

Voice for Adoption

SPEAKING OUT FOR OUR NATION'S WAITING CHILDREN

Voice for Adoption focuses our advocacy on achieving better outcomes for the 123,000 children in US foster care 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 permanence that provide children with true, life-long family connections.

2019 VFA Advocacy Priorities

Providing Funding for Discretionary Mandatory Adoption Programs — To encourage and support adoptions, many states and jurisdictions use discretionary federal funding streams, including the Adoption Opportunities Program, Promoting Safe and Stable Families, and the Adoption/Guardianship Incentive Program. VFA encourages the federal government to continue to invest in these programs.

- VFA encourages continuation of, full funding of, and enhancements to the Adoption/Guardianship Incentive Program, and required reporting from states on how they used adoption/guardianship incentive payments. Congress needs to appropriate enough funding to fully award all states that qualify under the Incentive Program.
- Congress should continue to fully fund the incentive program at the 2019 level of \$75 million or higher to ensure states receive any incentives they earn.
- VFA urges continued support for and increased investment in other federal funding streams used for adoption promotion and support services, including Promoting Safe and Stable Families, Social Services Block Grant, and TANF.
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- VFA urges HHS to provide Adoption Opportunities Program grants, including funding of postadoption support, recruitment of adoptive families for older youth, and programs to address overrepresentation of children and youth of color in foster care. VFA also calls for increased appropriation and authorization above the current \$100 million.
- VFA urges Congress to reauthorize the Adoption Opportunities Act and strengthen authorization language around funding of post-adoption support, recruitment of adoptive families for older youth, and programs to address overrepresentation of children and youth of color in foster care.

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- VFA urges Congress to maintain the national resource center on adoptions as currently authorized through the Adoption Opportunities Act and assure it is funded to address the growing need for post-adoption and other needed services and adoption goals

Increasing Children's Chances of Finding a Permanent Family — More children will find a permanent family if laws, policies, and practices prohibit discrimination against prospective parents or youth based on sexual orientation, gender identity, marital status, religion, or disability. We strongly oppose any efforts to impose or allow categorical restrictions on prospective families.

- VFA opposes efforts by states to encourage such discriminatory policies.
- VFA encourages Congress to pass federal legislation that prohibits discriminating against prospective parents based on sexual orientation or gender identity or in the name of religious liberty. VFA opposes any legislation or policies that would allow discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity or in the name of religious liberty.
- VFA encourages Congress to pass federal legislation that provides resources to states to better equip social workers and others to develop and support prospective and current adoptive/foster parents with disabilities.

Making the Adoption Tax Credit Refundable — VFA believes the adoption tax credit would encourage more adoptions from foster care if it were refundable, making it accessible to low- and moderate-income families.

- VFA urges Congress to maintain the federal adoption tax credit and make it refundable.

Supporting Support Services for Adoptive and Guardianship Families — VFA calls for increased and dedicated federal funding for post-adoption and post-guardianship services and supports to these families to ensure the safety and well-being of children.

- VFA urges Congress to fully fund Title IV-B, part 2 (Promoting Safe and Stable Families) funding designated for post-adoption services and maintain or increase the required investment in postadoption and post-guardianship resulting from the adoption assistance Title IV-E de-link.
- VFA encourages the Administration to implement the Family First Prevention Services Act in a way that will expand and support post-adoption services.
- VFA urges HHS to continue to track and report on how states are investing in post-adoption and post-guardianship services at least 20 percent of the savings from the

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adoption assistance IV-E de-link and to provide guidance to states on the re-investment requirement.

- VFA urges Congress to provide funding that can expand research on post-adoption services and increase the number of programs and initiatives that meet the evidence-based standards under the Family First Preservation Services Act.

Protect and Fully Implement of the De-Link of Adoption Assistance Program from the 1996 AFDC Program. The Family First Prevention Services Act of 2018 was partially paid for by a delay in the expanded eligibility of IV-E Adoption Assistance. Since the passage of the Fostering Connections to Success and Promoting Adoptions Act of 2008, IV-E Adoption Assistance eligibility has been expanded each year until all Adoption Assistance would be based on the child's needs and not tied to the birth parents' income eligibility for the 1996 AFDC cash assistance program. This expansion was complete by October 1, 2017 (FY 2018) but was rolled back by the Family First Act. Coverage of children under the age of two has now been delayed to July 2024.

- VFA calls on Congress to reject any effort to further delay this expansion of IV-E Adoption Assistance eligibility to all children who meet the state's special needs definition.

Ensuring Continued Entitlement Funding to States and Tribes for Core Adoption and Foster Care Services — The Title IV-E program and Medicaid are critical supports to ensure that states and tribes have the necessary funding to provide core services and supports to children in foster care and adoption, including placement support and medical care. Maintaining these programs as entitlements ensures that jurisdictions have the funding to meet the needs of ever-changing numbers of children in foster care and adoption.

- VFA urges Congress to oppose block granting of Title IV-E and Medicaid and to maintain these programs as open-ended entitlements.
- Prevent any reductions in the number of children who are IV-E eligible.

Ensuring Youth Who Age out of Care Have Access to Health Care — As a result of the Affordable Care Act, young people who aged out of care without a permanent family had the abilities to remain on Medicaid until age 26, just as other young people can stay on their parents' plans.

- VFA urges Congress to maintain access to Medicaid for youth who aged out of foster care up until age 26 and maintain this benefit in every state and oppose special Medicaid waiver requirements that serve as a barrier to Medicaid and health care coverage.

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Respecting Children's Access to Their Tribal Heritage and the Sovereignty of Tribes — Children have a right to their tribal heritage. As governments, tribes have sovereignty in child welfare decisions and recent court actions threaten the vital role the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) plays in the placement of children.

- VFA supports the Indian Child Welfare Act and opposes any action through the courts or Congress that would weaken its enforcement and impact.
- VFA urges the Administration to proceed with ICWA regulations and proposed changes to the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis System (AFCARS) data collection system.

Enhancing Children's Access to Their Identity — VFA recognizes that race, sexual orientation, and gender identity are all issues that matter to children and youth. We must respect children's identities. There have been recent administrative and legislative actions that threaten child-placement decisions that are based on the sexual orientation and gender identity of children and adoptive parents.

- VFA calls for amendments to the Interethnic Adoption Provisions and HHS policies to allow race/ethnicity to be one of the factors considered in permanency planning and to encourage agencies to prepare families who are adopting transracially.
- VFA advocates 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 encourages Congress to pass federal legislation that prohibits discriminating children and teens in foster care or adoption due to the child's sexual orientation or gender identity or in the name of religious liberty. VFA opposes any legislation or policies that would allow discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity or in the name of religious liberty.

Breaking Down Barriers to Interstate Adoptions — In many cases, the best placement for a child may be in another state. Currently, such placements are quite challenging to complete and can delay permanence. VFA believes the federal government has a critical role to play in easing the process of interstate placements.

- VFA urges Congress to continue to support the implementation of the National Electronic Interstate Compact Enterprise (NEICE) program.

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- VFA urges HHS to examine how to better encourage states to collaborate when making adoptions across states.

Ensuring All Children and Youth Have a Permanency Case Goal — VFA calls for the federal government to ensure that all children and youth in care have a case goal of permanence. 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 urges Congress to continue to thoroughly review APPLA/OPPLA by holding hearings and requiring a GAO report on state policies and practices. VFA also urges Congress and the Administration to provide oversight of the Strengthening Families Act's requirements related to APPLA/OPPLA, and to ensure successful implementation by state child welfare agencies.
- VFA urges Congress to mandate a legally permanent case goal (reunification, adoption, or guardianship) for every child. We also encourage HHS to provide technical assistance and guidance to states on how to meet this goal.

Expanding Access to Title IV-E Training Funds to Encourage Permanency — Restrictions on the use of Title IV-E training funds can prevent child welfare agencies (both public and private) from drawing down federal training funds in a way that can help replicate successful strategies and models to promote the adoption of children and youth from foster care.

- VFA encourages HHS and Congress to work with states, nonprofits, and private entities to maximize the use of Title IV-E training funds to the child welfare workforce's ability to implement evidence-based/evidence-informed recruitment, development, and support efforts that encourage the adoption of older youth and children with disabilities and other challenges

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 encourages legislation that provides all adult adoptees with the right to access their original birth certificates.