

PROMOTING ACCOUNTABILITY AND EXCELLENCE IN CHILD WELFARE ACT OF 2011 (S. 1509)



The Promoting Accountability and Excellence in Child Welfare Act (S. 1509), introduced by Senator Wyden (D-OR) in early August, is legislation that would support innovative, collaborative and effective efforts by state agencies to improve the well being of children and families involved in the child welfare system. The bill provides incentives for States to improve the lives of children in foster care through systemic reforms and innovations, increased collaboration between State agencies, and incorporation of higher standards of accountability.

PROMOTING CHILD WELL-BEING AND SHIFTING OUR FOCUS TO PREVENTION

Currently, the federal government spends approximately 10 times more on foster care than on preventative services despite evidence that out of home care often produces the worst outcomes for children. Critical limitations of the existing federal child welfare financing structure limit the ability of states to provide a diverse array of services to families in need and call attention to the need for a comprehensive reform of the fiscal system. While reform is needed, it may take time for Congress to pass comprehensive child welfare financing legislation.

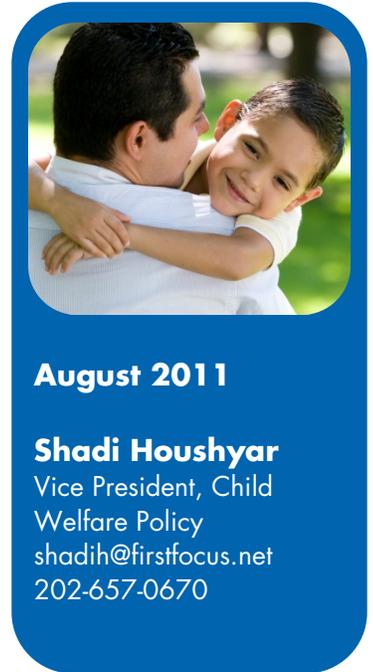
In the absence of such reform, funding is needed to allow states the flexibility they seek to alter services and keep more children out of foster care. In addition, at present, the multitude of local, state and federal agencies who serve the children and families involved in the child welfare system often operate in isolation. This lack of communication between and among stakeholder agencies leads to duplicative provision of services and inefficient use of federal funds.

HOW PROMOTING ACCOUNTABILITY WORKS

Incentivizing Evidence-Based Programming and Accountability in Child Welfare

The bill establishes a 5 year grant program, providing \$160 million in funds to states and localities to promote greater flexibility and encourage the implementation of comprehensive reforms to existing child welfare programs - provided they can demonstrate success in improving child well-being. Grant funds will incentivize expansion of early-intervention services, heightened reunification efforts, and enhancement of existing support services for children who enter foster care. The bill also requires greater collaboration between agencies through creation of an interagency working group. This group would bring representatives from the Departments of Education, Labor, Justice, and Housing and Urban Development together in an effort to streamline federal funding sources and ensure states are capitalizing on all available funds.

The bill also imposes strong performance measures that require states to continuously assess the efficacy of their programming. These measures emphasize the implementation of reforms and achievement of considerable progress in the improvement child well-being.



August 2011

Shadi Houshyar

Vice President, Child Welfare Policy
shadih@firstfocus.net
202-657-0670

The First Focus Campaign for Children is a 501(c)(4) nonprofit affiliated with First Focus, a bipartisan children's advocacy organization.

Encouraging Needed Changes to Child Welfare Financing

The bill requires the HHS secretary to make recommendations to Congress on how to delink Title IV-E foster care maintenance payments from the out-dated AFDC income eligibility levels. Under the current method, less than half of children in foster care are eligible for these funds. As a result, states struggling to finance their foster care programs must divert funding from other sources such as TANF and SSBG programs. By removing the AFDC measure, more children would be eligible to receive these maintenance payments, relieving States of some of the financial burden, and enhancing the quality and availability of social services.

INVESTING IN A QUALITY CHILDHOOD FOR ALL KIDS

Every child deserves the opportunity to grow up in a safe, stable, and nurturing environment. Too many children continue to endure trauma and unnecessary entry into foster care, and the programs available to support these youths and their families have failed to evolve with the changing needs of each state. The Promoting Accountability and Excellence in Child Welfare Act gives states the resources they need to create effective programs and prevent this trauma while ensuring that those children who do enter care are given the best supports and services possible so they do not fall behind their peers.