



County Welfare Directors Association of California

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June 23, 2008

The Honorable Jim McDermott
Chairman, Ways and Means Subcommittee on Income Security
and Family Support
1102 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Jerry Weller
Ranking Member, Ways and Means Subcommittee on Income Security
and Family Support
1102 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman McDermott and Ranking Member Weller:

The County Welfare Directors Association of California supports the *Fostering Connections to Success Act* (H.R. 6307). The bill contains strong provisions that help promote permanency options for children in foster care. They mark good first steps to improving the entire foster care system. We have highlighted a few provisions of key importance to county human services agencies in California.

Kinship Guardianship Assistance Payments: California's counties have partnered with the state to administer and finance the Kinship Guardianship Assistance Payment (Kin-GAP) Program. Created in 2000, the program serves approximately 16,000 families by establishing a permanency option for children under the care of a relative. We are very proud of the program's progress and successful outcomes for Kin-GAP children. Because of our state and county success, we are encouraged to note that the bill establishes a landmark federal IV-E option for relative guardianship payments.

We are disappointed, however, to note that the bill fails to address a provision in the Adam Walsh Act which will no longer allow our state and the state of New York to continue to use, in very limited circumstances, exemptions in our criminal records check process for prospective foster and adoptive parents. A 2006 survey demonstrated that only four percent of California's relative caregivers seeking approval to care for their abused or neglected relative child received a criminal record exemption under the state's alternative process.

We are unaware of any children harmed by such a placement. While federal policy and county child welfare practice place priority on relative placements, about 650 prospective California families annually who wish to care for their relative child will no longer be eligible to do so, due to the Adam Walsh provision which becomes effective October 1, 2008.

Family Connection Grants: CWDA supports the bill's provision authorizing \$50 million annually for states, counties and other child serving agencies to develop additional tools to identify relatives

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for children in the child welfare system, as well as craft kinship navigator programs and other programs and activities to strengthen families caring for at-risk children.

Children Aging Out of Foster Care: CWDA supports providing states the option to provide IV-E services to youth up to age 21. In our state, about 4,200 foster youth who turn 18 are emancipated each year. This provision will provide much needed support in improving the frequently poor outcomes foster youth experience when making the transition to independence.

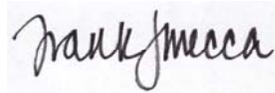
Adoption Incentives Program: CWDA supports the reauthorization of the Adoption Incentives Program. California continues to vigorously pursue adoptions, with nearly 7,400 adoptions finalized in federal fiscal year (FFY) 2006. Adoption is one key component in an overall effort by California counties' to reduce the number of children in our custody. Due to the structure of the current incentive system, however, California has not earned incentives since FFY 2001. CWDA welcomes both updating the baseline year to 2007 and increasing the payments for finalized adoptions.

Other Provisions: Coordination of health and educational services are critical in meeting the needs of children in the child welfare system. CWDA will work with the state to ensure that our current procedures and the state's IV-B plan includes strong provisions for health care coordination and individual case plans promote educational stability for children under our care.

CWDA supports the bill and looks forward to working with Congress to continue to improve the child welfare system through this legislation and future measures.

If you have questions about our views, please have your staff contact Tom Joseph, Director of CWDA's Washington Office at 202.898.1444 or tj@wafed.com.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Frank Mecca". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above the typed name and title.

Frank J. Mecca
Executive Director