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Grassley wins committee passage of bill to help foster care kids get permanent, loving homes

WASHINGTON — The Senate Finance Committee today approved legislation first proposed by Senator Chuck Grassley to help move kids in foster care to permanent homes. Grassley urged congressional leaders to find a way to achieve final passage of the legislation before the end of this year's session.

“This bill is about giving hope and opportunity to some of the most vulnerable kids in the country,” Grassley said. “Today, 15,000 children could leave foster care for good and enjoy the security and stability of a permanent home if we provided federal assistance to their legal guardians who are also their relatives, and that’s just one aspect of this comprehensive legislation.”

Grassley’s bill – the Adoption Assistance and Relative Guardianship Support Act of 2008, S.3038 – was introduced in May and was endorsed by the Iowa Foster and Adoptive Parents Association, the Kids Are Waiting: Fix Foster Care Now campaign sponsored by The Pew Charitable Trusts, the Child Welfare League of America, the National Foster Care Coalition, the North American Council on Adoptable Children, and the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption.

Grassley marked introduction of the bill in May by hosting foster care children and families from Iowa at an event on Capitol Hill to promote adoption initiatives for foster care kids.

The legislation approved today was a modification of the original Grassley bill, which promotes adoptions by reauthorizing and improving the adoption incentive program and by phasing in federal adoption assistance available to all children in foster care who have special needs. It also builds on the success of federal waivers and state experience establishing permanent homes for foster children by supporting legal relative guardianships. And, it creates a state option to support legal relative guardians for children for whom courts have ruled out adoption and the chance to return home to their birth parents. Changes made to the proposal include an option for states to extend services to kids in foster care up to age 21 and allow Tribes to serve children in their communities directly with culturally appropriate care and understanding by providing Indian Tribes with the same direct access to federal funding for foster care and adoption services that states currently receive.

Grassley is the Ranking Member of the Senate Committee on Finance, which is responsible for social welfare legislation including adoption policies.