



U.S. SENATE COMMITTEE ON

Finance

SENATOR CHUCK GRASSLEY, OF IOWA - CHAIRMAN

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Grassley Continues Work to Advance Adoption, Focusing on Special Needs Children

WASHINGTON – Sen. Chuck Grassley, chairman of the Committee on Finance, today said he will act on the findings of a new report to make sure federal programs work well to promote the adoption of special needs children.

“Federal adoption assistance and adoption incentive programs need to work as well as they possibly can,” Grassley said. “They’re a means to an important end, and that’s permanent homes for children. Today’s findings show that these programs are helping, but we have to do more. I’ll work to help make these programs 100 percent effective. It’s a no-brainer to protect children’s welfare.”

Grassley was a lead requester of a report from the Government Accountability Office, which he released today at an event with adopted youth, including an Iowan, Sean Maudlin of Indianola. Maudlin was adopted at age 12 after stints in foster care and is now an honor student who will attend college in the fall.

The report said the federal incentives to promote foster-care adoptions that Congress adopted in 2003, 2001 and 1997 have contributed to an increased number of adoptions. However, challenges remain, including:

- the need to improve sharing of reliable data on how best to recruit adoptive families;
- the need for better integration of and coordination among the courts and state agencies to help address court delays;
- and better procedures for placing children across state lines.

Grassley said he looks forward to working with the Department of Health and Human Services to improve data collection and dissemination and to working on legislation to better coordinate the courts and state agencies and streamline interstate placement.

As chairman of the Finance Committee, with jurisdiction over taxes, Grassley said he also remains committed to advancing tax policies that help promote adoptions. In the 2001 tax relief law, Grassley expanded the adoption tax credit to help prospective parents with adoption expenses. He also doubled the income-tax exclusion for employer-provided adoption benefits. “We need to make these successful initiatives a permanent part of the tax code,” Grassley said.

Grassley said it's also time to build on the progress made since Congress created new incentives for states to promote foster-care adoptions with the *Adoption Promotion Act of 2003*, along with the new bonuses that were created for states with the *Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997*.

“The blessings of adoption have enriched the lives of families across America,” Grassley said. “There’s no doubt that public policy should continue to expand opportunities for every child to be welcomed home by a loving family every day of the week from infancy to adulthood. Sean Maudlin of Indianola is a walking, breathing adoption success story, and there are thousands of kids like him all over the country.”

Grassley has a long track record of working to improve adoption policy. In 1997, he steered through Congress legislation aimed at improving the permanent placement of children assigned to the public foster care system. The *Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997* established new bonuses for states which improve the successful reunification of families and increase the adoption and placement of foster children into safe, permanent, loving homes. From 1998 to 2002, the states placed more than 230,000 foster children in adoptive homes – almost the same number of kids adopted in the previous 10 years.

Grassley’s work on the tax front is significant. To help promote adoptions and give prospective parents help with the expenses incurred during the adoption process, under his leadership in 2001, Congress doubled the adoption tax credit from \$5,000 to \$10,000. The expanded adoption tax credit includes domestic foster care, private and overseas adoptions. The credit begins to phase out for families with adjusted gross income over \$150,000. The 2001 tax law also doubled the income tax exclusion to \$10,000 allowed for employer-provided adoption benefits.

Today’s GAO report, GAO-05-292, “Child Welfare/Better Data and Evaluations Could Improve Processes and Programs for Adopting Children with Special Needs,” will be available at www.gao.gov.

Grassley made his remarks during an afternoon congressional briefing by Voice for Adoption. In 1994, this national advocacy organization presented Grassley its first-ever legislator of the year award for his work to win passage of the 1997 Adoption and Safe Families Act. Grassley is a member of the Congressional Coalition on Adoption.