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September 16, 2008

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
Office of the Speaker  
H-232, U.S. Capitol  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable John Boehner  
Office of the House Republican Leader  
H-204, U.S. Capitol  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Pelosi and Republican Leader Boehner:

I write on behalf of the American Bar Association and its more than 385,000 members worldwide to urge you to take the necessary steps to ensure passage this month of important improvements in programs supporting children and youth in foster care, including new opportunities for permanent families through adoption and relative guardianship and other assistance for older youth transitioning from foster care. The House unanimously passed the Fostering Connections to Success Act (H.R.6307) in June, and the Senate Finance Committee approved a similar bill last week. Today, the relevant committees announced agreement on H.R.6893, the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008, which reconciles the House and Senate bills. We join with a broad array of national, state and local organizations that advocate for children and youth in supporting this much-needed legislation and in our desire to ensure that H.R.6893 will be enacted during this session of Congress.

The Act has strong bipartisan support and is fully paid for. Its important improvements will help hundreds of thousands of children in foster care by:

- Extending and increasing incentives for adoption, particularly incentives for the adoption of children with special needs and older youth in foster care.
- Allowing states to offer for the first time federal assistance for guardianship payments for children who are in foster care but who have grandparents or other relative guardians who want to care for them permanently outside of foster care.
- Making it easier for immediate relatives to step in to raise children when their parents cannot by requiring notification of relatives when children are removed from their parents and providing grants to link caregivers with the services their children need.
- Offering important protections and support for American Indian children in foster care by allowing tribes, for the first time, the same direct access to federal foster care, adoption assistance, and relative guardianship funding that states have.

- Increasing opportunities for success for older youth in foster care as they transition into adult life by allowing them to continue to receive federal foster care payments beyond the age of 18.
- Improve educational opportunities for children and youth in foster care, which will also increase their opportunities for later success.
- Promoting the health care of children and youth in foster care.
- Expanding training opportunities for relative guardians, staff in private agencies and the courts, and attorneys and others representing children.

The ABA strongly supports the reforms that will be implemented by enactment of H.R.6893. These encompass many of the critical improvements to long-standing issues that former foster youth, adoptive parents, relative caregivers, and others have been requesting of Congress for years. We commend you for commitment to addressing the needs of our nation's most vulnerable youth and for your leadership in moving H.R.6893 forward toward final passage.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Thomas M. Susman", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Thomas M. Susman