

Conference of Chief Justices Conference of State Court Administrators

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September 10, 2008

The Honorable Harry Reid
Majority Leader
528 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Minority Leader
61-A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

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

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

Dear Senators Reid and McConnell and Representatives Pelosi and Boehner:

On behalf of the Conference of Chief Justices and the Conference of State Court Administrators, we are writing to urge you to take necessary steps to ensure passage this month of important improvements in support of 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. As you know, the House passed the Fostering Connections to Success Act (HR 6307) in June and the Senate provisions are moving toward final passage.

Both HR 6307 and the Senate provisions have bipartisan support and are fully paid for. Both proposals also include the following important improvements that 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 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 supports 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; and
- Improving educational opportunities for children and youth in foster care, which will also increase their opportunities for later success.

All of these reforms encompass many of the critical improvements that hundreds of former foster youth, adoptive parents, relative caregivers, and others have been requesting of Congress. We commend you for your leadership and commitment to addressing the needs of our nation's most vulnerable children and youth. On behalf of state courts, we support timely enactment of these important improvements for children and youth in foster care.

Sincerely yours,



President
Conference of Chief Justices



President
Conference of State Court Administrators