

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

February 7, 2014

Barack H. Obama  
President of the United States  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Obama:

As you prepare your budget for Fiscal Year (FY) 2015, we urge you to expand funding to support permanent solutions for youth in foster care and to help them find their “forever family” when they cannot safely return home. In FY14, the Adoption Opportunities Program was funded at \$40.6 million, with \$4 million dedicated to state grants in order to test child-focused parent recruitment.

Millions of children in foster care across the country await adoption by a loving, caring family. Unfortunately, children who enter the child welfare system after the age of 14 are much more likely to age out of foster care than be adopted, leaving too many without a legal family once they exit the custody of the state. These children, already at a disadvantage, end up with no support network to which they can turn in times of crisis.

The outcomes facing youth who exit foster care on their own, rather than to a family, are extremely discouraging. More than half who aged out of foster care experienced episodes of homelessness, and 25 percent did not receive a high school diploma or GED. Additionally, fewer than 2 percent of foster care alumni finished college, compared to 23 percent of youth in the general population. These young people are also less likely than their peers to be employed or to have health insurance. Failure to secure permanent families for youth in foster care will result in substantial societal and governmental costs.

States that have expanded foster care beyond age 18 see limited benefits to the youth who age out. The grave and unsettling reality is that within five years of leaving foster care, even these children have erased many of the gains they achieved beyond their peers who left state custody at 18 years of age. Children (and young adults) need access to the security, support, love, and care that only a family can provide.

It is the goal of every child welfare agency to find a permanent placement for each child in foster care. Regrettably, many states are facing budget constraints that limit the number of caseworkers they can hire and the number of training programs available to them. This increased caseload means that each foster youth receives less attention and fewer resources. Far too many children linger in the foster system instead of being helped towards a permanent placement. Lessening caseloads would allow caseworkers to give their children the in-depth research necessary to find true permanency.

In addition to more manageable caseloads, caseworkers need training in evidence-based practices proven to lead to higher rates of permanency for youth in foster care. Providing training in child-

focused recruitment will help to ensure that state child welfare agencies are aware of all the options that they can use to find permanent placements.

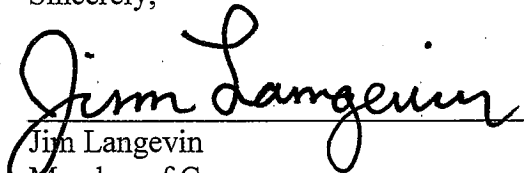
Child-focused recruitment places the child's interest and needs at the center of the case file. Caseworkers focus on the child's history, experiences, and unique needs in order to find an appropriate adoptive family. This can include the initial case referral, building a relationship with the child, conducting a case record review, assessing the child, ensuring the child and prospective family are prepared for adoption, network building, developing and updating a recruitment plan, and performing a diligent search for adoptive resources. Often the caseworker is able to find previously-unidentified adoptive parents, such as relatives, fictive kin, or a former foster parent. Many temporary caregivers are unaware that adoption is even an option and may welcome the opportunity given the proper education and resources.

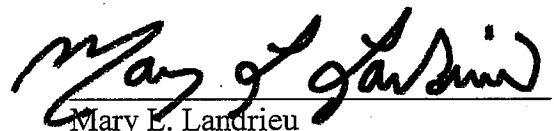
When a child is in the custody of the state, we have a moral responsibility to care for them as we would our own children. Funding for the Adoptions Opportunities Program should be expanded, and the set-asides for child-focused recruitment must be increased. We also respectfully request that the federal government explore all options to aid states in order to increase the hiring and retention of caseworkers. Smaller caseloads are directly correlated with higher placement rates.

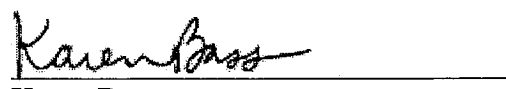
A 2006 Children's Bureau study found that "approximately \$65,422 to \$126,825 is saved for every child who is adopted rather than placed in long-term foster care." Investing in these services will improve the quality of life of our nation's foster youth and result in long-term societal and economic savings.

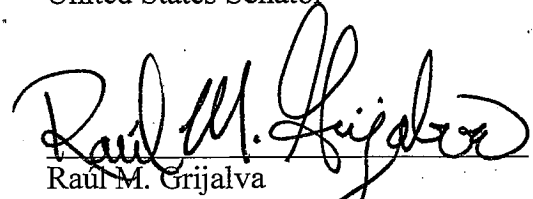
Thank you for your attention to this matter. We appreciate your feedback and look forward to working with you on this important issue.

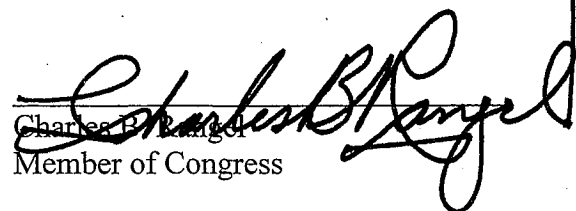
Sincerely,

  
Jim Langevin  
Member of Congress

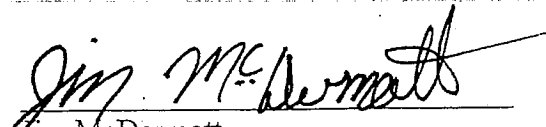
  
Mary E. Landrieu  
United States Senator

  
Karen Bass  
Member of Congress

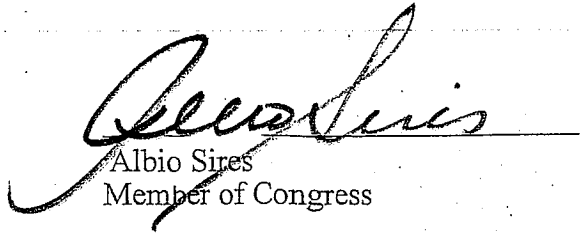
  
Raul M. Grijalva  
Member of Congress

  
Charles B. Rangel  
Member of Congress

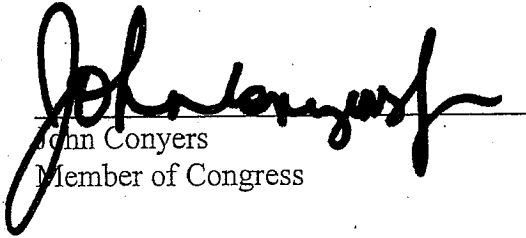
  
Sean Patrick Maloney  
Member of Congress



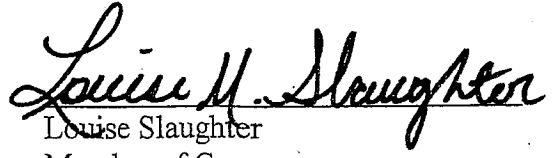
Jim McDermott  
Member of Congress



Albio Sires  
Member of Congress



John Conyers  
Member of Congress



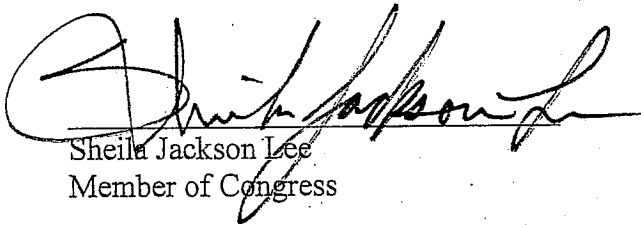
Louise Slaughter  
Member of Congress



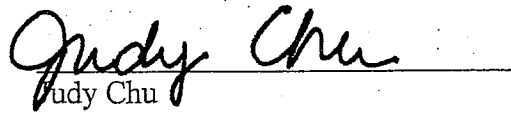
David N. Cicilline  
Member of Congress



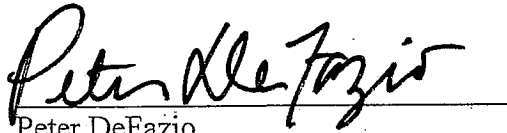
Tony Cardenas  
Member of Congress



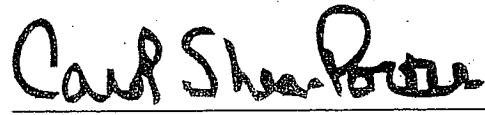
Sheila Jackson Lee  
Member of Congress



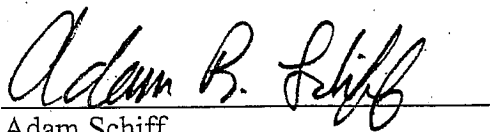
Judy Chu  
Member of Congress



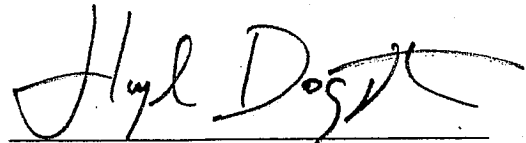
Peter DeFazio  
Member of Congress



Carol Shea-Porter  
Member of Congress



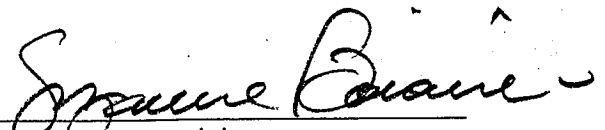
Adam Schiff  
Member of Congress



Lloyd Doggett  
Member of Congress



Rosa L. DeLauro  
Member of Congress



Suzanne Bonamici  
Member of Congress



Bill Foster  
Member of Congress