

Connecting Forever Families Act



Congressman Blake Moore (UT-01)

America's most vulnerable children are waiting to be efficiently connected to permanent homes as courts struggle to process cases. During the pandemic, backlogs and challenges around remote proceedings further delayed placements.

Tens of thousands of children in the foster care system are waiting to be placed in permanent homes that will provide a safe and stable foundation for their lives. Our nation's court system plays a major role in the child welfare process, conducting various types of proceedings to facilitate placement of children in foster care and in need of adoption. Unfortunately, courts are strained in their ability to help children in a timely manner due to new court training and hearing requirements and high demand as the child welfare system learns how to best handle the ongoing opioid crisis. During the pandemic, the situation worsened, as courts reduced or stopped in-person proceedings, which led to further backlogs, delaying placement of children in homes.

The Court Improvement Program (CIP) provides resources to state courts to assist in conducting child welfare cases. For years, it has been clear the CIP needs greater investment to help provide resources and training to courts, and President Trump and Biden's budget requests asked for more funding for this program. There is an opportunity to meet this need and improve the system as a whole. To hold hearings during the pandemic, courts began conducting remote and hybrid hearings. The switch to virtual formats provided a unique opportunity to improve outcomes for participants by increasing engagement and improving timeliness, which in turn led to better and faster outcomes for families and children. As courts try to incorporate these formats moving forward, Congress can provide greater resources, regulatory certainty, and guidance on how to best conduct remote hearings without compromising participant privacy.

The *Connecting Forever Families Act* would:

- 1 Increase funding for the Court Improvement Program (CIP) by \$30 million each year for the next five years to help support timely placement of foster youth in supportive homes. This increase of funding is offset, and the *Connecting Forever Families Act* does not add to the national deficit.
- 2 Codify regulatory language to ensure CIP funds retain wide flexibility to be used for technological modernization.
- 3 Require the Administration for Children and Families under the Department of Health and Human Services to provide non-compulsory implementation guidance for remote court proceedings every five years to inform how remote hearings can improve engagement and protect participant privacy.

Endorsing Organizations:

- The Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption
- The National Council For Adoption
- The North American Council on Adoptable Children