



*Voice for Adoption focuses our advocacy on achieving better outcomes for the 118,000 children in US foster care who are waiting to be adopted and the families who adopt children and youth from foster care. We believe that every child deserves and needs a permanent family. We support all forms of permanence that provide children with true, life-long family connections.*

## 2018 VFA Advocacy Priorities

**Providing Funding for Discretionary Mandatory Adoption Programs** — To encourage and support adoptions, many states and jurisdictions use discretionary federal funding streams, including the Adoption Opportunities Program, Promoting Safe and Stable Families, and the Adoption/Guardianship Incentive Program. VFA encourages the federal government to continue to invest in these programs.

- VFA encourages continuation of, full funding of, and enhancements to the Adoption/Guardianship Incentive Program, and required reporting from states on how they used adoption/guardianship incentive payments. Congress needs to appropriate enough funding to fully award all states that qualify under the Incentive Program.
- Congress should appropriate an additional funding total of \$50 million to replace lost revenue from FY 2018, this is in addition to regular appropriations
- VFA urges HHS to provide Adoption Opportunities Program grants, including funding of post-adoption support, recruitment of adoptive families for older youth, and programs to address overrepresentation of children and youth of color in foster care. VFA also calls for increased appropriation and authorization above the current \$39 million.
- VFA urges continued support for and increased investment in other federal funding streams used for adoption promotion and support services, including Promoting Safe and Stable Families, Social Services Block Grant, and TANF.
- VFA urges Congress to reauthorize adoption opportunities and strengthen authorization language around funding of post-adoption support, recruitment of adoptive families for older youth, and programs to address overrepresentation of children and youth of color in foster care.

**Increasing Children's Chances of Finding a Permanent Family** — More children will find a permanent family if laws, policies, and practices prohibit discrimination against prospective parents or youth based on sexual orientation, gender identity, marital status, or disability. We strongly oppose any efforts to impose or allow categorical restrictions on prospective families.

- VFA opposes efforts by states to encourage such discriminatory policies.

- VFA encourages Congress to pass federal legislation that prohibits discriminating against prospective parents based on sexual orientation, gender identity or in the name of religious liberty. VFA opposes any legislation or policies that would allow discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity or in the name of religious liberty.
- VFA encourages Congress to pass federal legislation that provides resources to states to better equip social workers and others to develop and support prospective and current adoptive/foster parents with disabilities.

**Making the Adoption Tax Credit Refundable** — VFA believes the adoption credit could encourage more adoptions from foster care if it were accessible to low- and moderate-income families.

- VFA urges Congress to maintain the federal adoption tax credit and make it refundable.

**Supporting Support Services for Adoptive and Guardianship Families** — VFA calls for increased and dedicated federal funding for post-adoption and post-guardianship services and supports to these families to ensure the safety and well-being of children.

- VFA urges Congress to fully fund Title IV-B, part 2 (Promoting Safe and Stable Families) funding designated for post-adoption services and maintain or increase the required investment in post-adoption and post-guardianship resulting from the adoption assistance Title IV-E de-link.
- VFA encourages the Administration to implement in a way that will expand and support post-adoption services, including opening Title IV-E funding to post-placement services as proposed in the 2018 Families First legislation.
- VFA urges HHS to continue to track and report on how states are investing in post-adoption and post-guardianship services at least 20 percent of the savings from the adoption assistance IV-E de-link and to provide guidance to states on the re-investment requirement.
- De-link the special needs adoption assistance under Title IV-B for all children delay that resulted from The Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008.

**Ensuring Continued Entitlement Funding to States and Tribes for Core Adoption and Foster Care Services** — The Title IV-E program and Medicaid are critical supports to ensure that states and tribes have the necessary funding to provide core services and supports to children in foster care and adoption, including placement support and medical care. Maintaining these programs as entitlements ensures that jurisdictions have the funding to meet the needs of ever-changing numbers of children in foster care and adoption.

- VFA urges Congress to oppose block granting of Title IV-E and Medicaid and to maintain these programs as open-ended entitlements.

Prevent any reductions in the number of children who are IV-E eligible.**Ensuring Youth Who Age out of Care Have Access to Health Care** — As a result of the Affordable Care Act, young people who aged out of care without a permanent family had the abilities to remain on Medicaid until age 26, just as other young people can stay on their parents' plans.



- VFA urges Congress to maintain access to Medicaid for youth who aged out of foster care up until age 26 and maintain this benefit in every state and oppose special Medicaid waiver requirements that serve as a barrier to Medicaid and health care coverage.

**Enhancing Children’s Access to Their Cultural Identity** — VFA recognizes that tribal affiliation and race matter to children and youth and respects that tribes have sovereignty in child welfare decisions

- VFA supports the Indian Child Welfare Act and the new ICWA regulations and guidelines.
- VFA calls for amendments to the Interethnic Adoption Provisions and HHS policies to allow race/ethnicity to be one of the factors considered in permanency planning and to encourage agencies to prepare families who are adopting transracially.
- VFA advocates for enforcement of the Multi-Ethnic Placement Act (MEPA) requirement to recruit families who represent the racial and ethnic backgrounds of children in foster care, and provide funding to support such recruitment.

**Breaking Down Barriers to Interstate Adoptions** — In many cases, the best placement for a child may be in another state. Currently, such placements are quite challenging to complete and can delay permanence. VFA believes the federal government has a critical role to play in easing the process of interstate placements.

- VFA calls for Congress to restore and to appropriate funding of \$10 million that expired in 2010 for the interstate placement bonuses to encourage the process to expedite adoptions across state lines. Congress should reward both sending and receiving states for creating interstate adoptions.
- VFA urges Congress to enact legislation that would support the National Electronic Interstate Compact Enterprise (NEICE) program.
- VFA urges HHS to examine how to better encourage states to collaborate when making adoptions across states.

**Ensuring All Children and Youth Have a Permanent Case Goal** — VFA calls for the federal government to ensure that all children and youth in care have a case goal of permanence. The use of the APPLA/OPPLA (Another/Other Permanent Planned Living Arrangement) case goal contributes to young people’s aging out of care with no permanent family.

- VFA urges Congress to continue to thoroughly review APPLA/OPPLA by holding hearings and requiring a GAO report on state policies and practices. VFA also urges Congress and the Administration to provide oversight of the Strengthening Families Act’s requirements related to APPLA/OPPLA, and to ensure successful implementation by state child welfare agencies.
- VFA urges Congress to mandate a legally permanent case goal (reunification, adoption, or guardianship) for every child. We also encourage HHS to provide technical assistance and guidance to states on how to meet this goal.



**Expanding Access to Training to Encourage Permanency** — Restrictions on the use of Title IV-E training funds prevent jurisdictions from replicating successful strategies to promote the adoption of children and youth from foster care.

- VFA encourages HHS and Congress to work with states, nonprofits, and private entities to maximize the use of Title IV-E training funds to the child welfare workforce's ability to implement evidence-based/evidence-informed recruitment, development, and support efforts that encourage the adoption of older youth and children with disabilities and other challenges

**Ensuring Access to Original Birth Certificates** — VFA recognizes that adult adoptees have a right to and often a need for more complete information about their birth families.

- VFA encourages legislation that provides all adult adoptees with the right to access their original birth certificates.

