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*Voice for Adoption*

SPEAKING OUT FOR OUR NATION'S WAITING CHILDREN



The Honorable Tom Cole  
Chairman  
Subcommittee for Labor, Health and Human Services,  
Education, and Related Agencies  
For the Committee on Appropriations  
United States House of Representatives  
2467 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Steve Womack  
Vice Chair  
Subcommittee for Labor, Health and Human Services,  
Education, and Related Agencies  
For the Committee on Appropriations  
United States House of Representatives  
2412 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Cole and Vice Chair Womack,

I am writing on behalf of Voice for Adoption (VFA), a coalition of adoption and child welfare agencies from across the US. We advocate on behalf of the 112,000 children in the US foster care system that are waiting to be adopted, and the families that adopt them. VFA firmly believes that no child is too old to be adopted, that every child deserves a permanent family, and most importantly, children do better in families.

The President's proposed budget for FY 2018 raised several concerns for the adoption community. Below we highlight our concerns involving the annual appropriations. We remain concerned about the continuation of the Adoption Opportunities program which is discretionary block funding. In the proposed budget, the program faces tremendous cuts. In addition, VFA is alarmed that the proposed budget for FY 2018 does not address the growing shortfall in funding for the Adoption and Legal Guardian Incentive Payments program.

### **Adoption Opportunities**

Voice for Adoption also opposes the Administration's proposal to cut \$9 million from the Adoption Opportunities Program, which is part of the Child Abuse and

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Prevention Services Act (CAPTA). In 2017, Adoption Opportunities is funded at \$39 million, meaning this cut is almost one-quarter of the program funding.

The Administration indicates the cut “*makes a targeted reduction to technical assistance efforts in the Adoption Opportunities Program.*” The Adoption Opportunities program has always been targeted toward providing technical assistance and ensuring the advancement of practices to address key needs such as the promotion of adoption for children of color or older children and establishment of effective post-adoption services that help families address the needs of children who have experienced trauma.

Adoption Opportunities has been authorized at around \$40 million but not fully and consistently appropriated in nearly a decade. We ask Congress to reject the proposed cut and to instead fully fund this program that helps ensure that children in foster care have families and that adoptive families have the support they need.

### **Adoption and Legal Guardianship Incentive Payments Program**

Although not addressed in the President’s budget, we also ask that Congress increase funding for the Adoption and Legal Guardianship Incentive Payments program. This important incentive program has rewarded states for increasing adoptions or guardianship placements from foster care. It has successfully encouraged adoptions since it was enacted as part of the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA). As a result, it was recently extended to encourage legal guardianships as well.

But its success has not been matched by appropriated funds. For many years, states’ adoption (and guardianship) increased numbers have earned more in payments than what is appropriated. In the past, when appropriations have not been enough to provide the full awards earned by the states, HHS made partial payments and then, in the next fiscal year, Congress increased the appropriation to address the shortfall and fund the next earned incentives payments. In the last few cycles, however, Congress has failed to address the shortfall. As a result, last year’s appropriations allowed HHS to pay only \$9 million in incentive bonuses, even though states earned \$41 million for increasing their adoptions and legal guardianships from foster care.

We ask that appropriators make up this shortfall of \$32 million from last year as well as provide the \$39 million requested in this year’s budget.

The above cuts proposed in the President’s budget ignore the needs of one of our nation’s most vulnerable populations—children and youth in foster care and adopted from foster care. Over the last few years, the foster care system has experienced a steady increase in the number of children in care, and a steady decrease in the federal government’s investment and appropriations to care for these children. It is



time for us to invest in children in foster care and adoption and to ensure they have the safety, stability, well-being, and permanency federal law requires for them.

Nelson Mandela once said, “There can be no keener revelation of a society’s sole than the way in which it treats its children.” We ask you to protect children by rejecting the President’s proposal to cut the Adoption Opportunities program. These cuts will exacerbate problems already facing children and families in foster care and adoption. We cannot balance the federal budget on the backs of children and youth who have experienced abuse, neglect, and trauma.

Investing in children and youth who have experienced abuse and neglect has a great return on investment when these children can grow up in safe, loving, and permanent families. It is well documented that children who are adopted have more educational success, reduced substance abuse and mental health issues, better employment outcomes, and lower likelihood of being incarcerated than their peers who age out of foster care with no family.

VFA urges Congress to invest in the foster care and adoption systems, and not to reduce or eliminate vital funding sources.

Thank you,

