

February 2008

Dear Members of Congress:

The undersigned organizations are writing to express our support for the bipartisan Adoption Equality Act (S. 1462 / H.R. 4901), which would ensure that more children adopted from state foster care would be eligible for federal support through Title IV-E of the Social Security Act. **We strongly urge you to sign on to this legislation as a co-sponsor and to encourage your colleagues to do the same.**

Right now, there are 114,000 U.S. foster children waiting for permanent loving families through adoption. These waiting children tend to be older, brothers and sisters who need to stay together, or children of color. Almost all of them have significant special needs. The Adoption Equality Act would provide states with resources to support the adoptions of more of these children. Promoting more adoptions is an investment that can provide real savings. Research has shown that the roughly 50,000 adoptions from foster care each year save from \$1 billion to \$6 billion in government expenses.

Currently, the main avenue through which children entering foster care become Title IV-E eligible is the income of the birth families. **Tying federal support for children to the income of a family from which all rights have been legally severed makes little sense.** The eligibility requirements are also linked to long-defunct welfare eligibility standards. Limiting federal adoption assistance may make a child less likely to be adopted or less likely to have the support he or she needs in a new adoptive family. In a recent survey, 81 percent of adoptive parents said that adoption assistance was important to their decision to adopt, and 58 percent said they could not adopt a foster child without this support that helps them meet the child's special needs.

A few years ago, Alissa and Sean were considering adopting Madilyn, a foster child with hydrocephalous, mild cerebral palsy, lung disease, and other serious medical issues. When they learned that adoption assistance could help pay for needed treatments and therapy, Sean says, "It moved us from thinking, 'Can we financially make it work?' and put the focus back where it should be—'Can we love and care for this child? Do we have the love and commitment to parent this child?' That was never in question!" Madilyn's successful adoption and the available assistance later opened the door for Sean and Alissa to adopt Tyler, a foster child with serious behavior problems due to prenatal meth exposure.

The Adoption Equality Act would ensure that no child who is adopted from foster care is denied federal support on the basis of his or her birth family's income. The legislation would also require states to re-invest any money saved as a result of the bill into their state child welfare services.

We believe that passage of the Adoption Equality Act is an important step toward achieving the federal goals of safety, permanence, and well-being for all children. Tens of thousands of foster children are waiting for a permanent, loving family, and this legislation can make it easier for them to realize that dream.