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Title IV-B Reauthorization Introduced in House

A bill reauthorizing Title IV-B of the Social Security Act has been introduced in the House of Representatives. Chairman Geoff Davis (R-KY) and Ranking Member Lloyd Doggett (D-TX) of the House Ways and Means Subcommittee on Human Resources introduced the Child and Family Services Extension & Enhancement Act (HR 2790). The bill extends funding authorizations for IV-B Part 1, Child Welfare Services (CWS) and Part II, Promoting Safe and Stable Families (PSSF) through 2016 and makes several improvements to the legislation.

CWS is a discretionary program providing flexible formula funding for a broad range of services designed to support, preserve, and/or reunite children and their families. H.R. 2790 maintains its authorization level at \$325 million. CWS includes the requirements for each state's child welfare services plan—which encompasses case reviews and permanency planning, program development, agency administration, and systems collaboration activities. H.R. 2790 adds additional requirements in regards to response to identified emotional trauma needs associated with maltreatment and removal, oversight of prescription medication monitoring protocols, activities to reduce time in foster care, and development needs for children younger than five.

The bill revises the CWS caseworker visit requirement. It was previously a goal to have 90% of children in care visited by their caseworker monthly—with a majority of those visits occurring in the child's residence—by October 1, 2008. H.R. 2790 maintains the 90% goal, as well as a tiered federal financial participation reduction for failure to comply, but it requires only that the total visits in a year to equal the amount of visits if a child were visited monthly. In addition, the tiered reduction for failure to comply is added for a new goal of 50% of caseworker visits occurring in the child's residence.

PSSF targets formula funding to four categories of services; family support, family preservation, time-limited family reunification, and adoption promotion and support. In addition, it includes reserved funding and additional authorizations for courts; substance abuse grants; caseworker visits; mentoring; and research, evaluation, and technical assistance. PSSF funding is both mandatory and discretionary. H.R. 2790 reduces the mandatory funding by \$20 million to \$345 million and maintains the authorization of \$200 million in discretionary funding. The reduction is in the reservation of funds for the court improvement program.

The bill also clarifies that court improvement plans should include requirements related to concurrent planning and the ability to bypass reunification efforts in certain egregious situations. H.R. 2790 also amends the annual report to Congress in PSSF to include actual spending in addition to planned spending by service category for the program. Within the discretionary grants targeting substance abuse, the bill would remove the provision giving greater weight to applicants addressing methamphetamine abuse specifically.

The bill would reauthorize the discretionary Mentoring Children of Prisoners grants at \$25 million each year through 2016. This program was zeroed out in the FY 2011 appropriations. H.R. 2790 makes a few additional changes to child welfare legislation. In IV-B, it adds a part III, titled, "Common Provisions," comprised of a section on "Data Standardization for Improved Data Matching." This calls on the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to work with the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to designate standard data elements for any category of information required to be reported in IV-B. Under IV-E of the Social Security Act, the bill clarifies that the requirement for educational stability for children in care refers to "each" placement, removing confusion about the requirements applicability beyond the first placement. Also in IV-E, the bill requires states to document savings from the de-link of adoption assistance payments from the old Aid to Families with Dependent Children eligibility that is part of the 2008 Fostering Connections legislation. Lastly, H.R. 2790 adds a requirement for HHS to study the state of recruiting and supporting foster parents, adoptive parents, and kin caregivers.