

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
United States Senate

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Minority Leader
United States Senate

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
United States House of Representatives

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
United States House of Representatives

Friday, April 10, 2020

Dear Majority Leader McConnell, Speaker Pelosi, Minority Leader Schumer, and
Minority Leader McCarthy:

Over the last several months, our country has been ravaged by the COVID-19 pandemic. With your leadership and dedication, Congress has passed legislation to support millions of Americans who have lost their jobs, supported small businesses and nonprofits, bolstered the financial support for industries such as the healthcare and airlines, and relaxed policies and regulations to allow access to health care using telemedicine. But more work is to be done, including a need to increase support for child welfare—where children and families have been directly affected and received little federal attention.

Voice for Adoption (VFA) advocates for children in foster care waiting to be adopted and the families who adopt them. Currently, among the 400,000+ children in foster care, there are 125,000 children waiting to be adopted. These children make up one of the country's most vulnerable populations. Many have been abused and neglected, bounced from home to home and torn from their communities. They have been through so much and our government has sworn to protect them and do what is in their best interest.

The pandemic is already exacting deep pain on children in foster care and adoptive and foster families, and we've yet to hit the peak of this disease. Due to COVID-19 children have had placements disrupted, visits with birth families canceled, desperately needed therapy or other services cut back, adoptions and other court proceedings stopped in their tracks. They also face real health risks to themselves and their families. At the same time, experts warn that domestic violence and child abuse are likely to increase — possibly creating increased demand on the child welfare, foster care, and adoption communities.

Congress must invest in protecting these most vulnerable children and their families!



Earlier this week, VFA held a town hall call seeking information on the needs of the foster care and adoption community. We ask Congress to act in the fourth stimulus package to do what needs to be done to stabilize the child welfare field and protect child welfare employees, those they serve, and those yet to be served.

Below are the recommendations from the experts in the field:

1. Ensure the FMAP rate increase is extended to the new Title IV-E Prevention Program. Right now, the Title IV-E Prevention Program is not currently reimbursed at the FMAP rate, but instead is reimbursed at a 50% rate (it moves to FMAP reimbursement in 2027), so we recommend a total of 50% plus the final FMAP increase passed under any stimulus.
2. Increase the FMAP reimbursement rate to 12% under Medicaid and all of Title IV-E, and make sure that it extends an entire year, not just one quarter. We can see now that this pandemic is going to have drawn-out impacts. Further, we need to make sure that any extension of the FMAP does not replace other federal support provided to child welfare.
3. Dedicate the new 6 percent funding outlined in 2 above to expanded child welfare services, including supporting a temporary increase in foster care and adoption maintenance and assistance payments to families.
4. Implement a temporary Title IV-E match of 75% for training and technology needs of the child welfare community for organizations, families, and children that are in need of software and technology to implement homeschooling and the various forms of telehealth. Extend this match to the technology needs of the child welfare agencies seeking to conduct work from home and make virtual visits, court hearings, and other critical events effective.
5. Require that states report how they are using stimulus funding for child welfare to provide accountability, but also to ensure that the stimulus funding was used to encourage the most family-like living situation possible, reduce trauma, and be in the best interest of the child.
6. Expand the Adoption Opportunities grants to fund demonstration projects on distance training and support options, not to replace future in-person training and support, but to supplement those services and to help systems prepare for future crises.
7. Increase funding to Title IV-B, Part 2, the MaryLee Allen Promoting Safe and Stable Families Program (PSSF), by \$1 billion. These funds can be used to prevent out-of-home placements and to support families who are raising children through adoption, foster care, and kinship care. PSSF is a



critical funding source for stabilizing families, supporting foster parents, and other prevention efforts for states during times of crisis.

8. Increase funding to the Social Services Block Grant by several billion dollars to help states provide critical services and supports tailored to the needs of their community, including child protective services, child abuse prevention services, and foster care. These funds can fill in gaps not covered elsewhere and backfill many human services, given the flexibility of SSBG. This should also include a set-aside for tribes, which does not currently exist.
9. Require each state to include in their Title IV-B plan a pandemic and disaster preparedness plan.

It is vital that Congress act now to act in the best interest of our nation's children in foster care, and their families. Thank you for your support and understanding that supporting children is a nonpartisan issue. If we stand together, we can keep our promise to our nation's waiting children and protect them and their families.

Sincerely,



Schylar Baber, MPA
Executive Director

