

Family First Prevention Services Act of 2016

To strengthen families by providing evidence-based prevention services to keep children out of foster care and reduce inappropriate group home placements

This bill would:

- Strengthen families and reduce unnecessary foster care placements by allowing states to use federal foster care dollars to pay for up to 12 months of family services to prevent children from needing to enter foster care. Biological families, adoptive families, and families where a relative is caring for the child would all be eligible for services, if needed to keep the child safely at home. Only prevention services classified as “promising,” “supported,” or “well-supported,” based on an evidence structure developed by the California Evidence-Based Clearinghouse, would be eligible for reimbursement. These services would include:
 - Mental health services;
 - Substance abuse services; and
 - In-home parent “skill-based” programs (parent training, home visiting, individual and family therapy)
- Ensure more foster children are placed with families by ending federal reimbursement when states inappropriately place children in non-family settings, such as group homes or congregate care facilities. To be eligible for federal payment:
 - The state would have to assess the child’s needs and determine the non-family setting was the most appropriate, subject to ongoing judicial approval.
 - Non-family settings would be subject to licensing and accreditation standards to ensure they provide appropriate supervision and have the necessary clinical staff to address their needs.
- Support family relationships by allowing states to receive a partial match for evidence-based Kinship Navigator programs to help children remain with family members whenever possible. Kinship Navigator programs provide information, referral, and follow-up services to grandparents and other relatives who unexpectedly assume caregiver responsibility for children who cannot remain safely with their parents.
- Help families stay together by reauthorizing the Regional Partnership Grant program that provides funding to state and regional grantees seeking to provide evidence-based services to prevent child abuse and neglect related to substance abuse, and updates grant requirements based on lessons learned from the most effective past grants. In addition, the bill updates the program to specifically address the opioid and heroin epidemic and leverage what’s been learned to ensure that new foster care prevention funding provided under the bill is used effectively.
- Improve support for the transition to adulthood by updating the John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program to allow states the option of continuing to assist older former foster youth up to age 23, including providing education and training vouchers.
- Reduce the amount of time foster children wait to be adopted, placed with relatives, or placed with foster parents by encouraging states to use electronic systems when placing children across state lines.
- Help relative caregivers avoid bureaucracy by promoting best practices for states by providing model foster care licensing standards with a focus on ensuring states promote placements with

family members for children in care. Keeping children with family members, when possible, improves outcomes for children and families.

- Support existing child welfare services by extending for five years the Promoting Safe and Stable Families and Child Welfare Services programs (jointly title IV-B of the Social Security Act) as well as the Adoption and Legal Guardianship Incentive Payments, which are set to expire at the end of the fiscal year.
- Delay final implementation of additional federal reimbursement for the adoptions of infants and toddlers to allow for a Government Accountability Office (GAO) review. The study will examine compliance with the *Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008* (P.L. 110-135) requirement that states reinvest the state funds freed up by providing additional federal reimbursement. All adoptive families would remain eligible for either state or federally-funded services, and adoptive families with a child at risk of reentering foster care would be newly eligible for evidence-based prevention services provided under this bill.

Savings:

The Congressional Budget Office preliminarily estimates that the cost of the up-front prevention services to strengthen families would be more than fully offset by reducing inappropriate group home placements and the short delay in providing additional adoption assistance to allow the GAO review to be completed.

Over the long term, providing evidence-based prevention services has been shown to reduce the need for costly, long-term foster care and improve outcomes for children and families.

Background:

- The nation is in the grips of an opioid epidemic which, according to states, is responsible for recent spikes in the need for out-of-home foster care placements after more than a decade of decline.
- Under current child welfare financing, when a family is struggling, the majority of federal dollars are only available if the state removes a child from his or her biological or adoptive home and places the child in foster care. Even though it is often less expensive and more effective, federal support for prevention services that can keep the child safe at home are extremely limited.
- Children who are raised by the state in foster care face increased risks of substance abuse, homelessness, teen pregnancy and other negative outcomes.
- The Family First Prevention Services Act would address issues associated with the opioid crisis by supporting early, evidence-based, cost-effective interventions to keep children safely at home, increases the likelihood of positive short and long-term outcomes for both children and parent.
- Moreover it would ensure that children who do need foster care are appropriately placed with family members, whenever possible.