

Honorable Members of the Subcommittee,

Every year about 160 young adults in the District of Columbia receive a terrible birthday gift. On their 21<sup>st</sup> birthday they are pushed out of the District's foster care system and left to fend for themselves, with no place to call home and no one to guide them in building a life of their own. With the support systems they had come to rely on now gone, these young men and women are at high risk of homelessness and victimization. Often they have no one to turn to for guidance; no one to offer them support in times of need; no one to be proud of their accomplishments. Many have no one to visit on holidays; no one to take them to a doctor; no one even to say their name aloud.

There is a way for many children and young adults to avoid the terrible fate of slipping through the cracks: adoption. An adoptive parent gives these children a place to call their home. An adoptive parent can offer guidance and support when it is needed most. An adoptive parent can give these young adults a helping hand to rely on, a kind word and loving smile to show how proud they are when their kids succeed.

*Family & Youth Initiative* strives to build a community of volunteers and prospective adoptive parents in order to find permanent homes for children at risk of aging out of foster care without a support system. This is accomplished by focusing on a smaller target group of hard to place children. Over time these children build a relationship with adults at events planned throughout the city, the final goal being that cultivation of relationships will lead to adoption. Since its inception in 2010, *Family & Youth Initiative* has assisted in the adoption of thirteen older children in foster care.

*Family & Youth Initiative* is a great example of innovative local programming which can be promoted by state and local government in order to reach their goals of increased adoptions. The *Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008* was created to build these types of programs. Due to their more focused nature, programs such as *Family & Youth Initiative* can be very effective at placing children and young adults who might otherwise age out of foster care into loving homes.

Due to the focused nature of this type of program, the amount of effort and therefore the amount of funding required is higher than other programs. This type of program is an example of the importance of maintaining the funding initiatives of the *Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008*. Regulatory steps are also a necessary consideration. Steps must be taken to insure that federal funding meant to improve adoption programs at the state level is used as intended. Increased funding used effectively results in increased availability of focused programming, leading to increased rates of adoption among difficult to place children and young adults.

While progress has been made, there are still thousands of children across the country in need of homes. It is our duty as a society to protect and nurture those among us who are at risk through no fault of their own. These young men and women need our commitment and our resolve to find someone they can call family.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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