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House of Representatives
COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS
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June 4, 2013

Dear State Child Welfare Administrator:

As the Chairman, Ranking Member, and members of the U.S. House Ways and Means Subcommittee on Human Resources, which has jurisdiction over the nation's foster care and related child welfare programs, we are writing to encourage your increased attention to helping children in foster care live more normal lives. Every day, children in foster care across the country face unnecessary barriers that limit their opportunities to succeed. However, we hope that by working together we can remove these barriers and improve the lives of thousands of foster youth across the country.

A hearing our subcommittee held on May 9, 2013 spotlighted this issue, along with recent state efforts to promote normalcy for children in foster care. We heard the views of former foster youth, experts representing youth in foster care, foster parents, advocates, and the State of Florida, which recently passed legislation designed to let kids in foster care be more like other kids. The hearing highlighted an amazing array of what David Wilkins, the Secretary of the Florida Department of Children and Families, said can only be called "bizarre" restrictions on children in foster care. The restrictions on young people in foster care detailed in various witnesses' testimony included:

- Playing sports, being in band, or participating in 4H and other common activities;
- Going to a sleepover at a friend's house;
- Going to the mall;
- Going to summer camp;
- Taking part in a family vacation;
- Being in a carpool;
- Getting a haircut;
- Getting a driver's license; and
- Having a part-time or summer job.

As parents and grandparents, we are concerned that this list and other examples in the hearing testimony we received suggests that too often the foster care system not only prevents kids from leading normal lives, but that it takes away exactly the sorts of activities that they need to grow and develop into happy, healthy, and productive adults. It is no wonder that, as one former foster youth put it, "Growing up in the foster care system, I felt like I was in captivity."

We recognize the paramount need for safety for children in care, but our quest for safety should not stifle the normal development of young people. We encourage you to consider the findings of our hearing and the excellent testimony we received, which is available on our committee website. We would welcome your feedback on this issue, including on your own state efforts to promote normalcy of youth in foster care. We also would welcome your thoughts on how federal laws or policies could better promote access to normal activities for young people in care.

We appreciate your review of this important issue. Young people in foster care are our common responsibility, and we look forward to working with you to improve their opportunities for success.

Sincerely,

Dave Reichert
Chairman
Subcommittee on Human Resources

Lloyd Doggett
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Human Resources

Todd Young
Subcommittee on Human Resources

John Lewis
Subcommittee on Human Resources

Mike Kelly
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Joseph Crowley
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Jim Renacci
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