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Increasing Adoptions from Foster Care  
February 27, 2013

Hello, Chairman Dave Reichert, Ranking Member Lloyd Doggett and members of the Subcommittee on Human Resources. I am Lisa Mathey, an adoptive parent and advocate for adoptive children and families in Virginia. I am pleased to submit my statement regarding the importance of increasing adoptions for children from living in the foster care system while they wait for a permanent family. Thank you for the opportunity to submit my statement focusing on such an important federal policy.

I am submitting this statement as an effort to increase the focus on the federal level for establishing post-adoption resources and services for families after finalization that will assist them in overcoming the crisis that puts their permanency at risk for disruption. As an adoptive parent advocate, I meet with adopted children and families who struggle every day to find resources that help alleviate the stress they feel as they try to address the child's triggers of past neglect and trauma, and learn how to maintain a healthy permanent family relationship. While there is an established and successful post-adoption resources and services program that provides crisis management, counseling, and support groups in Virginia to all adoptive families, the most difficult obstacle I face as an adoptive parent advocate is finding adoption competent professionals to work with the families to address the many issues that put them at risk for disruption. These issues range from behavioral disorders such as ADHD and PTSD to mental health illnesses and developmental delays caused by abuse, neglect and in-utero exposure to alcohol and drugs.

In many discussions with adoptive parents, I hear time and time again how they must spend several hours in therapy visits educating the professional on how little their own biological and mental health history is part of the cause for the issues that I just mentioned. Having access to an adoption competent professional at the beginning of implementing post-adoption resources and services for the child will increase the family's chances of maintaining permanency; and more importantly, helping the child heal mentally and thrive developmentally in a more appropriate time frame. For that access to become available, local, state and federal funds need to be spent in creating or expanding adoption competent training programs for professionals in all 50 states. One such program is already in existence in Maryland and should be replicated nationally. The Center for Adoption Support and Education (C.A.S.E.), in partnership with the Dave Thomas Foundation, offers the Training for Adoption Competency (TAC) program to mental health and child welfare professionals throughout the United States. This comprehensive training program has grown from six (6) sites in 2012 to ten (10) sites in 2013. This growth of the TAC program shows professionals are interested in becoming adoption competent. Federal policy makers need to support bringing programs such as TAC closer to the professionals who want to become adoption competent and those who can truly benefit from it, the adoptive youth and families.

Increasing the number of adoption competent professionals will in turn increase the availability of quality post-adoption resources and services. More opportunities to develop and deliver adequate support services, with the adoption incentive bonuses that States receive, will increase confidence for those

considering adopting a youth between the ages of 9 and 17; our country's most disadvantaged population for adoption from the foster care system. By offering adoption incentive bonuses for post-adoption resources and services programs to adoptive families, we increase the chances for a youth in this age group to be adopted. These bonuses will provide the prospective adoptive family with the resources, support and skills needed to parent the youth with much greater success than what is occurring now. It will also decrease the wait time for youth to be adopted because the prospective family will be better prepared to address the youth's mental health illness, physical disabilities and/or traumatic past. Prospective parents will feel assured that all the services the child receives while in foster care won't automatically disappear if they proceed to adoption. Knowing such services are available to them in the case a situation arises will provide adoptive families the confidence and knowledge they need to meet some of the challenges that arise when parenting children with a history of abuse, trauma or neglect. We know that some of these challenges arise only once an adoption is finalized and the child starts to feel at ease in a safe and loving environment. However, in my experience, parents are not always equipped to manage some of the behaviors seen as their children try to work through their experiences. This is where adoption competent professionals can play a big role, but as stated previously, there is a lack of such trained individuals. A federal focus on this is needed. This investment in preparation will in turn create a home that will give the youth a chance at a developing a permanent relationship intended to last a lifetime and becoming a self-sufficient and independent adult. It will also relieve the state from spending funds to maintain the youth's foster care placement and related services, or worse a dissolved adoption.

By not increasing the focus on the federal level for establishing post-adoption resources and services from the state to the local foster care systems, prospective and current adoptive families will continue to struggle in providing and maintaining a permanent home and will be left with no other choice but to leave or return the youth to the foster care system until they reach adulthood. Every youth deserves a permanent home and the post-adoption resources and services to stay there.

I would like to thank the Subcommittee for its interest in hearing the public's perspective and experiences for improvements to increase adoptions. I hope you will better understand the importance and need for federal leadership to further the development of post-adoption resources. A federal focus is needed to strengthen families after finalization, to assist these children and families in overcoming some of the challenges - that with proper interventions can mitigate crisis - and help all involved understand the normal stages of adoption and healing. It is my hope you will take into consideration the points I have made in this statement to improve the efforts to increase to post-adoption resources and services throughout the foster care system. In closing, I appreciate the dedication of this Subcommittee to hear from your constituents on such an important federal policy. I look forward to your continued efforts on behalf of children and families.

Respectfully Submitted,

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