

Statement for the Record Submitted by:

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*Before the:*

**United States House Committee on Ways and Means,  
Subcommittee on Human Resources**

*For the hearing:*

**Increasing Adoptions from Foster Care**  
March 13, 2013

Dear Honored Chairman Dave Reichert, Ranking Member Lloyd Doggett and members of the Subcommittee on Human Resources, we are Kelly DeLany, Director of the Northwest Adoption Resource Exchange, and Kendra Morris-Jacobson, Director of Oregon Post Adoption Resource Center & Oregon Adoption Resource Exchange. Together, we thank you sincerely for the opportunity to contribute testimony to this very important topic of increasing adoptions for children in the foster care system who wait for adoptive families.

We would like to narrow our very brief discussion to what we feel are two critical subtopics: 1) helping older foster youth find adoptive families; and 2) post adoption services. We will explore how we feel both relate to adoption incentive funding.

### ***Children Aging Out of Foster Care***

Despite the good news that there are fewer children coming into foster care annually, and that younger foster children are continuing to be adopted, the fact that over 26,000 foster children age out of the system each year illustrates an escalating and exponential crisis that must be addressed.

Over a short five year period, 26,000 older youth multiples rapidly to 130,000 young people between the ages of 18 and 22 who statistics show are more than likely to become: homeless, involved with the criminal justice system, unemployed, battling addictions, struggling with mental health issues, experiencing early parenthood, among many other struggles.

Is that what we want for our young people? Is this what we want the result of foster care to be? It is hardly what we, as States, as a Nation, can either accept or afford. Foster care is meant to help steer children towards a safer and brighter future, not condemn them towards the probability of the dismal list above. Even our own definition of foster care “Foster care is intended to be a short term solution until a permanent placement can be made.” (Dorsey et Al. *Current status and evidence base of training for foster and treatment foster parents*) indicates the contrary.

Adoption incentives, if restructured to target increases in specific areas (i.e. older children) would help states to focus their efforts on the waiting foster children who need it most – those who are at risk of aging out.

### ***Post Adoption Services***

A second topic that is often overlooked is the importance of post adoption services. Once foster children are placed with adoptive families, there is the misperception that now “everything will be fine.” For some children, fortunately, this is the case. However, the many foster children who have experienced extreme trauma, and/or who have mental health issues, developmental delays, addiction risks, or other types of special needs, will often require support, treatment and advocacy long after they have been adopted. In order to maintain the adoptions and parent these children with specialized needs, their adoptive families require education and support themselves; for some families, extensively so, including kinship caregivers who might be caring for children “by surprise.”

For every adoption from foster care, it saves states a minimum net savings of \$143,000 (Barth, et al, 2006); not to mention how much it can cost the state when children are coming back into care when the further trauma of an unsuccessful adoption has occurred. Adoption disruptions and

dissolutions are expensive, let alone the devastating emotional toll they have on already traumatized children, and the families who were trying to help them, reducing the chances that a child can be adopted again, or that a family will be willing to adopt again from foster care. By providing post adoption services in assorted forms (education, consultation, training, support groups, advocacy, networking, connection to resources, adoption-specific mental health therapy, etc.) , states can help families and their adopted children to remain or become healthy and stable, and have a much greater chance at a permanent, successful adoption. Successful adoptions are not only better for children and families, they are better for communities and more cost-effective for states long term.

### ***Conclusion***

In essence, adoption incentive monies, if reauthorized and refocused, can go a long way in helping foster children connect with loving, permanent adoptive families – both through helping inspire states to work harder to find adoptive families, particularly for older children or those with higher specialized needs, and in providing post adoption services to ensure the adoptions are truly permanent, but **only if states are held accountable for funneling these funds back into adoptions and post adoption support services.**

Sincerely,

Kendra Morris-Jacobson & Kelly DeLany