Attached please find Testimony for:

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The U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Ways and Means,
Subcommittee on Human Resources

Regarding the Hearing:
Improving Programs Designed to Protect At-Risk Youth
June 16, 2011
“Life day to day has become tougher. We have had a little respite this past year thanks to your support...today, I feel more ready to live with him tomorrow.”

~The Caldwell-Krabe Family, regarding help for their adoptive son from the Oregon Post Adoption Resource Center,

La Pine, Oregon – December, 2010

Dear Honorable members of the Subcommittee, we thank you for your time and interest in the topic of post adoption services for families adopting from foster care.

We, Kelly DeLany, Director of the Northwest Adoption Exchange and Kendra Morris-Jacobson, Director of Oregon Programs – Oregon Post Adoption Resource Center, both programs of Northwest Resource Associates, would like to present the following testimony regarding the importance of the continued availability of federal funding for the Promoting Safe and Stable Families (PSSF) and the Stephanie Tubbs Jones Child Welfare programs.

Supporting families who step forward to adopt our nation’s most vulnerable children – foster children who cannot live with birth parents due to neglect, abuse or parental substance use – is a pressing social and fiscal necessity. Finalizing the placements of foster children into loving adoptive homes with families or relatives who can care for them safely is not only critical for children, but saves each State hundreds of thousands of dollars each year.

We offer this testimony based on the perspective and experience of our State’s post adoption services program, the Oregon Post Adoption Resource Center (ORPARC). ORPARC’s ability to serve children and families is made possible by federal funding through PSSF, Title IV-B Subpart 2 of the Social Security Act.

The story of ORPARC, described below, demonstrates how even a small amount of federal funding at the State level can create a successful and far-reaching impact.

A national award-winning program, ORPARC is one of the best, proactive investments that Oregon makes in children and families. As Oregon adoption worker Cathy Tuma states, “What is the cost of a disrupted adoption...?... I can’t think of any resource as valuable or cost-effective as ORPARC.”
ORPARC’s 12-year-old program helps families to maintain adoptions of special needs foster children through free, culturally competent and evidenced-based post adoption services. The clients that ORPARC serves include the growing population of grandparents and kinship or guardianship families raising adoptive grandchildren and/or other adoptive relatives.

One of the first of its kind in the United States, ORPARC was created in response to the increasing number of adoptions stimulated by the Adoption and Safe Families Act. ORPARC has since served as an exemplary program for many other States. ORPARC received the 2006 National Adoption Excellence Award from the Federal Children’s Bureau, and is one of only eight organizations nationwide listed by the North American Council of Adoptable Children (NACAC) and the Child Welfare Information Gateway as a model post adoption services program.

Utilizing just five staff, ORPARC presently serves over 9,000 adoptive and assisted guardianship families parenting approximately 11,896 children under the age of 18. Since the State of Oregon finalizes the additional adoptions or guardianships of more than 1,000 state children each year, ORPARC’s client base is continually growing.

As an example of how even a small program like this can be effective, on an annual basis, ORPARC delivers 25-35 statewide trainings; fields almost 2,000 calls for parenting consultation, crisis intervention or service referrals; sends out over 1,500 library materials; and assists 55 statewide adoptive family support groups. ORPARC’s strategic community connections and support services help families and state workers find, network, and connect with existing resources in their communities.

An impactful and lean program, ORPARC’s preventative services help adopted children to stay adopted, avoiding costly returns to state care. Each adoption from foster care brings a net savings of $143,000 to state and federal governments1. Given that the cost of residential treatment in Oregon can reach $150,000/year per child2, if ORPARC helps just “one child” to stay adopted the savings more than justify an investment in this vital program.

Many of our nation’s foster children have complex needs that require extra parenting commitment. Within the last five years alone, ORPARC has helped a minimum of 77 families in crisis to preserve their adoptions of high needs foster children. When families facing an adoption disruption crisis can turn to a program like ORPARC, it relieves the burden on already strained State budgets and workforces. In Oregon, it is estimated to cost $26,605 per child per year to be raised in basic foster care3. If just five children disrupt from adoption and return to care, the cost of their care for one single year nearly surpasses the State’s annual funding for ORPARC ($135,072)!

2 Clackamas Behavioral Health Division. (2011, March 8). [Email communication].
Numerous States, including Oregon, are facing budget shortfalls. Over the last two biennia, the ORPARC program, itself, has been in jeopardy from State budget cuts. In fact, starting July 1, 2011, ORPARC will receive a reduction in State funding that will impact the scope and breadth of its services.

Many States face similar scenarios to Oregon, making the ORPARC story nationally relevant. We would like to emphasize how crucial it is to ensure that federal support through PSSF remains stable, both so that children can live safely and permanently with families, and so that States can make efficient use of our nation’s resources. We not only urge Congress to reauthorize this legislation, but we encourage you to significantly strengthen the language regarding State implementation of post adoption services. *Post adoption services help States to make smart, targeted investments of their limited dollars.*

We thank you for the careful consideration and deliberation that you, as Subcommittee members, are giving these issues. If we can be a resource for the Subcommittee, please don’t hesitate to contact us at 503-241-0799.

For the families themselves, a reliable post adoption services program such as ORPARC is a lifeline. In closing, we leave you with these thoughts from an Oregon family:

> “From social services I adopted two children with a lot of problems from prenatal drug and alcohol and other early abuse, and ORPARC has been a ray of sunshine in what has, at times, been a very difficult road. When I first contacted ORPARC I cried when they did not ask my income or where or when my kids were adopted....all they asked is what they could do to help. …it is a huge relief to just have someone want to help... Thanks for your support of this service…” 

~The Raven Family, Halfway, Oregon - March, 2011