



June 12, 2017

The Honorable Lloyd Smucker
516 Cannon House Office Building
United States House of Representatives
Washington DC 20515

The Honorable Terri Sewell
2201 Rayburn House Office Building
United States House of Representatives
Washington DC 20515

Dear Congressman Smucker and Congresswoman Sewell:

The Child Welfare League of America offers its endorsement for HR 2866, Reducing Barriers for Relative Foster Parents Act.

The legislation will direct the Department of Health and Human Services to identify reputable model licensing standards with respect to the licensing of foster family homes and encourage states to examine their practices in licensing and any waivers of state provisions.

As you know with support from key leaders like yourselves we have made some progress over the past two decades in promoting the use of relative care in the placement of children. In addition, we have taken significant strides in reducing the nation's foster care numbers in this century. Foster care caseloads stood at 568,000 in 1999 while the number of children and youth in foster care decreased to 397,000 by 2012. Part of that progress has depended on increasing use of relative care.

Last year's foster care numbers released by HHS indicated that in 2015, 427,910 children were in foster care, an eight-percent increase since 2012. New data suggests that drug abuse by the parent was the primary reason for the child's removal in 32 percent of cases. The progress of the recent past is being threatened by the increased use of opioids and other substances. In turn that trend is likely to create greater dependence and needed support for relative care.

We need to continue efforts to strengthen foster care and relative care. This legislation can offer important encouragement to state child welfare systems.

Again, thank you for your support and interest in this issue we hope we can continue to come together around some important federal investments and reforms in child welfare.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Christine James Brown". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Chris James-Brown
President and CEO