



CHILDREN NOW

June 13, 2017

The Honorable John Faso
U.S. House of Representatives
1616 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Karen Bass
U.S. House of Representatives
2241 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman Faso and Congresswoman Bass:

Our organizations write in support of HR 2847, set for markup in the House Ways and Means Committee on Wednesday, June 14.

HR 2847 would make a number of improvements to the John H. Chaffee Independent Living program, recasting existing provisions of the program to focus services more on assisting youth who experience foster care at age 14 or older to make a successful transition to adulthood. Most services available under the program would remain the same or be changed in minor ways, with two important exceptions:

- The bill would allow states to further extend the upper age limit for assistance under the Chaffee Program to age 23.
- The bill would provide for up to 5 cumulative years of education and training vouchers up to age 26, instead of the current upper age limit of 23.

The bill also would create a redistribution mechanism so that unspent funds would be redistributed to states that could expend them on a rolling two-year cycle. Additionally, the bill requires the Administration to produce a report to Congress by October 1, 2018 regarding outcomes for foster youth who leave care before age 17 vs those who remain in care up to age 17, and their well-being at ages 19 and 21. We appreciate this mechanism, although we note that to the extent that the overall pot of available funds for states is insufficient to meet increased demand for services such as the education and training vouchers, resources would be stretched thin and services could be constrained as a result. We encourage Congress to consider adding funds to the Chaffee Program as warranted in future budget cycles.

As a state that extended foster care up to age 21, California has seen the improved outcomes that go along with a longer period of assistance to these youth. Allowing states the option to extend Chaffee supports to youth for an additional two years could build on these successes for states that have matching funds available to do so.

Finally, we note that the contents of this legislation also are included in HR 253, the Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA). While the provisions included in HR 2857 are not controversial, our organizations have major concerns with the broader FFPSA. We would need significant amendments to improve other sections of that bill before we could support it. Should the underlying legislation begin to move, we urge a full consideration, with stakeholder engagement, committee hearings and a meaningful opportunity for organizations such as ours to request amendments.

For these reasons, our organizations are in support of HR 2847.

Sincerely,

Susanna Kniffen, Policy Director
Children Now

Amy Lemley, Executive Director
John Burton Advocates for Youth

Justin Garrett, Legislative Representative
California State Association of Counties

Frank Mecca, Executive Director
County Welfare Directors Association of California

Brandon Nichols, Interim Director
Los Angeles County Department of Child and Family Services

Angie Schwartz, Policy Director
Alliance for Children's Rights