

August 2, 2022

Senator Charles Grassley
United States Senate
135 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Senator Maggie Hassan
United States Senate
324 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senators Grassley and Hassan,

On behalf of foster and adoptive families, kinship caregivers, family-serving organizations and advocates for children and youth in foster care, we write to share our support and endorsement for the Data-Driven Foster Parent Recruitment and Retention Act of 2022.

Our organizations bring deep expertise on the issue of foster and adoptive parent recruitment and retention. We know first-hand about the challenges children in foster care face before, during and after their foster care journeys. We also know what a positive difference it makes in their lives when they are cared for by stable, supportive foster families, which includes relative and non-relative foster families.

While we wish that no child ever needed foster care, the foster care safety net is a vital community resource for children who cannot remain safely at home. Foster families are the backbone of this safety net and therefore it is important for child welfare agencies to recruit and retain a diversity of foster families who can meet the unique needs and children in foster care and nurture their healing and well-being. Foster families also help by nurturing bonds between children and their birth families and supporting children leaving foster care to reunify with their families or join new forever families through adoption or guardianship.

Many years of experience tell us that the important work of recruiting foster families requires agencies to utilize effective, data-driven approaches. *The Data-Driven Foster Parent Recruitment and Retention Act of 2022* offers much-needed improvements to federal policy by providing clear guidance to help child welfare agencies plan and implement best practices in foster parent recruitment and retention.

The Act would spur practice improvements that align with the changes foster families and kinship caregivers have been calling for and that are essential to achieving the best outcomes for children and families. These include:

- **Engaging birth, foster, kinship and adoptive families as key partners** so that their expertise and experiences can guide agencies in making ongoing improvements to recruiting, licensing, training, supporting families who are caring for children and youth in foster care. We enthusiastically support the provision calling on agencies to stand up, or support, foster family advisory boards. State examples of family advisory boards, such as in Illinois and Missouri, prove how impactful these family-agency partnerships can be in driving practice

improvements and better outcomes for children and families. Also, renaming 'diligent recruitment' plans to Family Partnership Plans helps set new expectations that families are engaged as valued partners.

- **Promoting practice improvements that lead to better outcomes for children and youth in foster care.** By requiring agencies to improve their collection and use of data to establish goals, assess needs, and measure progress, the Act empowers agencies to make significant progress towards increasing kinship placements, improving the stability of all foster care placements, and improving recruitment and retention of families who care for teens, sibling groups and other special populations. Incorporating outcomes measures will help improve the experiences children have during and after foster care and positively impact children's health, well-being and success in life.
- **Ensuring accountability and transparency.** We applaud the provisions in the Act that call on both state and federal child welfare agencies to generate data-driven reports on foster family capacity and congregate care utilization, and to collect and share feedback from foster and adoptive families and youth on key issues including licensure, training, support and reasons why foster families stop fostering. States that are utilizing data-driven approaches provide compelling examples of the need to scale up the use of data in foster parent recruitment and retention. We also support the working group on data collection that would bring together researchers, practitioners and individuals with lived experience to engage with program leaders at the Department of Health and Human Services to ensure that the most useful data and information is collected and used by agencies in reports that inform policy and practice improvements.

Children do best in families. This includes children and youth in foster care. We applaud your leadership and commitment to developing bipartisan and research-based solutions to strengthening an incredibly important safety net for children and youth. We are pleased to lend our support to the *Data-Driven Foster Parent Recruitment and Retention Act of 2022* and encourage your colleagues in Congress to support this legislation so it can be enacted on behalf of children, youth and families across the country.

Sincerely,

National Organizations

National Foster Parent Association

North American Council on Adoptable Children

Voice for Adoption

Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption

Children's Home Society of America

The Family Focused Treatment Association

State organizations

Voices for Virginia's Children

CHAMPS Colorado

Foster Source (Colorado)

Voices for Vermont's Children

Foster Parent Alliance of Washington State

Kansas Foster & Adoptive Parent Association

Foster Forward (Rhode Island)

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT

FosterAdopt Connect (Missouri & Kansas)

New Mexico Child First Network

Fostering Futures-Kentucky Fostering and Adoptive Care Association

Oregon Resource Family Alliance

RaiseAChild (California)

Adoptive and foster parent Association of Georgia

Foster and Adoptive Parent Advocacy Center (Washington, DC)

Adoptive and Foster Families of Maine, Inc. & The Kinship Program

Children & Families First Delaware

Embrella, Embracing & Empowering Families (New Jersey)

Maryland Resource Parent Assoc. (Maryland)

West Virginia Foster, Adoptive and Kinship Parents Network