

The Honorable Harry Reid  
U.S. Senate Majority Leader  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
U.S. Senate Minority Leader  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
U.S. Speaker of the House  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable John A. Boehner  
U.S. House Minority Leader  
Washington, DC 20515

October XX, 2009

Dear Madam Speaker, Leader Reid, Leader Boehner and Leader McConnell:

The undersigned national child welfare and mental health organizations and similarly impacted child- and family-strengthening organizations ask that as you finalize comprehensive health reform legislation, keep our nation's most vulnerable children and youth at the forefront and maintain the therapeutic foster care provision contained in both the House and Senate bills. Championed by Senator Debbie Stabenow (D-MI) and Congresswoman Tammy Baldwin (D-WI), the therapeutic foster care provision is Section 1641 in the Senate Finance bill and Section 1727 in the America's Affordable Health Choices Act of 2009 (H.R. 3200).

Children who come into contact with the child welfare system receiving placement and in-home services have a higher rate of physical and mental health issues, stemming either from abuse and/or neglect or from preexisting health conditions and unmet long-term service needs. Before they walk through the service delivery door, many of these children have been exposed to multiple traumas, including domestic violence, physical and emotional abuse, neglect, community violence, and exposure to other risk factors such as parental mental health problems, substance abuse, and poverty.

Some of the most vulnerable of this population receive much needed assistance and medical intervention in therapeutic foster care (TFC) placements. TFC provides medically necessary, cost effective services to at least 50,000 children with severe mental and behavioral health needs in a community-based environment. Recommended in the 1999 U.S. Surgeon General Report on Mental Health as an effective intervention, TFC is evidence-informed and results in positive outcomes in terms of the child's behavior and maintaining permanency.

The therapeutic foster care provision contained in both the House and Senate health reform bills provides one small piece of help to children and youth with serious health needs. The provision provides the first-ever federal statutory definition of therapeutic foster care and protects Medicaid reimbursement for the treatment central to therapeutic foster care. We look forward to progressing other legislation that will strengthen health coverage for children and youth in foster care such as the Medicaid Services Restoration Act (S. 1217), but in the immediate, we are greatly appreciative that health reform has begun to address their needs.

Thank you for your leadership and for working so diligently to improve the health care system. Please remember vulnerable children and youth in this debate and keep the therapeutic foster care provision in the final health reform legislation.

Sincerely,

Alliance for Children and Families  
American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry  
American Academy of Pediatrics  
American Association of Children's Residential Centers (AACRC)  
American Humane Association  
American Mental Health Counselors Association  
Anxiety Disorders Association of America  
Association for Ambulatory Behavioral Healthcare  
Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law  
Black Administrators in Child Welfare, Inc.  
Child Welfare League of America  
Coalition on Human Needs  
Every Child Matters Education Fund  
First Focus  
Foster Care Alumni of America  
Foster Family-based Treatment Association  
Generations United  
John Burton Foundation  
KidsPeace National Centers  
Lutheran Services in America  
Mental Health America  
National Alliance on Mental Illness  
National Association for Children's Behavioral Health  
National Association of Social Workers  
National Black Child Development Institute  
National Collaboration for Youth  
National Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare  
National Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health  
National Foster Care Coalition  
National Foster Parent Association  
National Indian Child Welfare Association  
National Organization of State Associations for Children  
The Arc of the United States  
The MENTOR Network  
The Rebecca Project for Human Rights  
United Cerebral Palsy  
Voices for America's Children  
Youth Law Center