

OCTOBER 27, CAPITOL HILL MEETINGS, WASHINGTON DC

NFPA, COSA & FOSTER PARENT LEADERS

Collaborators and allies: Journey to Success, Youth Law Center, Child Welfare League of America, Foster Club and more.

LAY OF THE LAND

- Title IVB up for reauthorization; possible child welfare vehicle this Congressional year.
 - Diligent recruitment requirement is germane to IVB
- Increasing attention on foster care placement issues stemming from news coverage of:
 - foster parent shortage,
 - hoteling issues,
 - youth mental health crises.
- Ongoing interest among policymakers in supporting positive outcomes for youth in all domains of their life: education, health, mental health, family and permanence and more.

MEETING GOALS

- Build new or strengthen existing relationships with Congressional committee members and Congressional delegation members from your home state.
- Share your expertise. Position yourself, and your organization, as a trusted, available resource on foster care issues.
- Educate and engage your Congressional delegation's interest by sharing state-specific information about foster care and foster parenting in your state.
- Point out solutions. Highlight one or more steps that federal policymakers can take to support foster parents and the children and youth they care for. (See talking points chart)

MEETING SCHEDULE

- 10 AM – NOON – CoSA members meet 1:1 with members from their state’s Congressional delegation. Depending on availability, there could be 1-3 meetings during this time.
- Noon – 12:30 – Lunch break. Ideally in Capitol Visitors Center in a private room. Lunch provided.
- 1:00 – 2:30 pm -- Briefing with bipartisan, bicameral staff of the House Ways and Means Committee and Senate Finance Committee.
- 3:00 – wrap up

PREPARATION

- Review suggested talking points
 - Select topic that’s most meaningful. *It’s not necessary to cover all. It’s most important to select a topic that is most meaningful or relevant to you and think about why it’s important to you and your state.*
- Review your state’s data on key foster care issues, especially related to the topic you’re speaking to. Decide what data you’d like to share.
 - Permanency rates, placement stability, foster parent data (training, retention, recruitment, etc)
- Reflect on a personal story based on your experience as a foster parent that illustrates why reform is needed.
 - Identify a specific example that relates to your talking point. Stories will help make your meeting more memorable. But make sure you can share it in a brief way.
- Have your talking points ready to go. Personalize and practice those.
- Wear comfortable shoes. Journey to Success team can take the lead on scheduling meetings, which may entail fast walking to get from place to place. Reach out separately if you’d like to discuss.
- Aim for nonpartisan discussions.

- Stay flexible. Keep in mind: each meeting will be different, and some will go more smoothly than others. That's okay!

KEYS TO A SUCCESSFUL MEETING

- **Introductions** are important. Don't rush. Introductions are an important part of the meeting. Be brief but be sure to convey your experience as it establishes you as a go to resource.
- **Expressing thanks**. It's always nice to express thanks for the staffers' time, interest and/or past leadership.
- **State the purpose of the meeting**. Example:
 - We are here to share some of our experience as [foster/kin/adoptive parents] in [city/state].
 - We know that Congress has a long history of caring about outcomes of youth in foster care. We are grateful for that.
 - We also understand you may be hearing about foster parent shortages, youth mental health needs, hoteling and other challenges. These are big challenges in our state.
 - These issues are important because they impact the daily life of children and youth, and they pose barriers for youth achieving permanency.
 - Foster care is intended to be a temporary safe haven. All of us want children and youth in foster care to have belonging with family.
 - Supporting foster parents and caregivers is critical to youth having permanency whether it's reunifying with their families or having lifelong family through guardianship or adoption.
 - We're here to share our insights on how improving foster parent recruitment, retention and support is an important part of improving outcomes for youth.
 - We have suggestions for steps Congress can take.
- **Dive in on a positive note**
 - We'd like to start by sharing a bit of information about what's working in our state
 - But there is a lot of room for improvement.
 - Share data or example about
 - Foster parent shortage / turnover
 - Unmet youth mental health needs
 - Use of hotels, office, etc

ISSUE 1: FOSTER PARENT SHORTAGE/TURNOVER

- WHY THIS MATTERS FOR YOUTH
 - Stable, supported family-based placements are healing and are linked to better outcomes in school, work, mental health, relationships and more.
 - Too many youth are separated from siblings; these are some of the most important, lifelong relationships a young person will have.
- ACTIONS CONGRESS CAN TAKE
 - We support the bipartisan Recruiting Families Using Data Act, H.R. 3058/S. 1313, sponsored by Rep. Kildee (MI) and Feenstra (IA) in the House and Senators Grassley (IA) and Hassan (NH) in the Senate.
 - This bill revises and updates the existing requirement in Title IV regarding diligent recruitment of foster and adoptive families. It will help expand best practices such as kin-first, sibling connections, and family placements for teens. It also will improve how agencies partner with birth, foster, kin and adoptive families to improve recruitment and retention.
 - Guidance to child welfare agencies on recruitment has not been revised since 1994. We have learned a lot since then and developed a kin-first culture.
 - The next most critical step is for youth and foster families to have access to a core set of supports. There are sample recommendations for how Congress can legislate in Title IVE to create “**core supports**” for family-based foster care.
- WHY ACTIONS WILL MAKE A DIFFERENCE
 - Trained and well-supported family-based care is linked to placement stability which is linked to positive permanency outcomes
 - Good matches between youth and family are key to stable placements, healing, well-being, success in school
 - Supporting foster families is key to retaining families and addressing turnover. One of the top reasons foster parents give for quitting is NOT the child’s behavior but the lack of support.

ISSUE 2: HOTELING AND LACK OF FAMILY-BASED PLACEMENT OPTIONS

- WHY THIS MATTERS FOR YOUTH
 - Children in foster care often have significant trauma from adversity in childhood as well as trauma associated with being in foster care.
 - Stable, well-supported placements with family are one of the most important ways youth can heal.
- ACTIONS CONGRESS CAN TAKE
- WHY ACTIONS WILL MAKE A DIFFERENCE
 - State child welfare agencies lack the data to target recruitment strategies and to understand what supports caregivers need to care for youth with complex needs.
 - States that are using data are showing the power of data-driven recruitment
 - Meeting the support needs of families will improve stability for youth and help retain foster parents to be stable.

ISSUE 3: ADDRESSING UNMET YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH NEEDS

- WHY THIS MATTERS FOR YOUTH
 - Children in foster care often have complicated mental health needs. If they don't have the opportunity to heal, they will face more significant challenges in school, work and relationships.
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- ACTIONS CONGRESS CAN TAKE
 - We support the Foster Youth Mental Health Act, [S. 2836](#), which would create a national navigation program to support the mental health and wellbeing of foster youth and former foster youth and provide assistance to foster, adoptive parents, kinship guardians, and parents.
 - This bill would also require states to develop a more comprehensive mental health system for youth in foster care, which would better support their caregivers.

- We support legislation from last Congress, [S. 3761](#) of 2021, The Treatment Family Care Services Act, which would provide a standardize definition of treatment family care (formerly therapeutic foster care) and would require Medicaid to provide guidance to the states on opportunities to provide treatment family care.
- We also support stable, family-based placements for youth.
 - Recruiting Families Using Data Act, H.R. 3058/S. 1313 will improve recruitment, retention, support and training for kin and foster families
 - We support new legislation to create “core supports” for youth and foster families.
- WHY ACTIONS WILL MAKE A DIFFERENCE
 - Improving support for youth & caregivers is a critical step in addressing the significant unmet mental health needs of children and youth in care. Stable, supported caregiving contributes to youth healing.
 - Better collaboration between state Medicaid agencies and the child welfare agencies

ISSUE 4: WORKFORCE SHORTAGES

- WHY THIS MATTERS FOR YOUTH
 - Caseworker turnover is linked to longer stays in foster care
 - Strengthening the workforce and ensuring caseworkers have manageable workloads will increase support for foster parents, improve retention and lead to more stability for children and youth in care.
 - Overwhelmed caseworkers with overly high caseloads aren’t able to attend to the needs of children, youth or caregivers. This contributes to placement stability, which harms permanency outcomes and hurts foster parent retention efforts.
- ACTIONS CONGRESS CAN TAKE
 - Increase the \$20M for workforce development in Title IV-B for better training for caseworkers (Kati, can we reference that this is a recommendation from CWLA?)
 - Create new competitive or formula grants in Title IV-B of the Social Security Act with additional funding for states to address both recruitment and retention
 - Create taskforces or working groups or direct existing entities to compile and disseminate best practices on issues such as creating psychological safety and wellness for staff, racial disparities in child welfare and promoting a diverse workforce, and reducing barriers to social work licensure.

- Efforts to strengthen families and prevent foster care are also helpful; with manageable caseloads, caseworkers can focus more on the complex needs of youth in care.
- WHY ACTIONS MAKE A DIFFERENCE
 - Strengthening the workforce and ensuring caseworkers have manageable workloads will increase support for foster parents and lead to more stability for children in care.

CLOSING

- Restate your key message
- Recap any information you promised to provide after meeting
- Share any leave-behinds
- Exchange your contact information

BONUS ACTIONS

- Take a group photo with your lawmaker/staff for social media if time permits. Tag the lawmaker's account and thank them for their attention to issues affecting foster parents and foster youth. Add any specific guidance from Eddy here - live video etc?
- Keep up the momentum! Send a timely thank you email, reiterating your two-three main points. If the lawmaker/staff asked you for additional data or information, set the tone with a prompt response.
- Keep the lines of communication open. Continue serving as a helpful, trusted resource by sharing timely information with congressional staff, such as state-specific reports or articles on foster parent issues.