



U.S. SENATE COMMITTEE ON

Finance

SENATOR CHUCK GRASSLEY, OF IOWA - CHAIRMAN

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Statement of Chairman Grassley

Senate Finance Committee Hearing, "Fostering Permanence: Progress Achieved and Challenges Ahead for America's Child Welfare System"

Wednesday, May 10, 2006

Today's meeting is for the purpose of hearing testimony on "Fostering Permanence: Progress Achieved and Challenges Ahead for America's Child Welfare System." Last month, the Senate Finance Committee heard testimony on the devastating effects that the methamphetamine epidemic is having on child welfare agencies. We also heard testimony on the strains that exist on the child welfare system, which are distinct from the meth problem.

Today's hearing has several purposes: to elaborate on the issues raised during the hearing on the effects of meth on states' child welfare agencies and for members to hear testimony on child welfare issues generally, and the Promoting Safe and Stable Families Program and the Mentoring of Children of Prisoners programs specifically. The authorization for both these programs ends at the end of this fiscal year.

The committee will hear testimony on the development of the 1997 Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) which was enacted to emphasize the safety, permanency and well-being of children. ASFA reauthorized, expanded and re-named the former Family Preservation and Support Services program to the Promoting Safe and Stable Families program.

I was pleased to have actively participated in the development of the Adoption and Safe Families Act. This legislation was negotiated in a genuinely bipartisan manner. All indications are that this bipartisan tradition will persist relative to legislation addressing child welfare issues.

The Promoting Safe and Stable Families program provides funds to states, territories and tribes for four categories of child and family services: family support; family preservation, time-limited reunification, and adoption promotion and support. These funds help a broad range of families. Promoting Safe and Stable Families provides one of the few funding streams to actively address problems within families that if not addressed could lead to a child's removal from the home.

The Promoting Safe and Stable Families program also includes funding for Court Improvement Grants. The courts play a significant but often overlooked role in achieving permanency for children. Some judges are taking a real leadership role in their states to better serve children. I look forward to learning more about the important work being done through the courts, in collaboration with child welfare agencies, to increase safety and permanence for children.

I am encouraged by reports that following a landmark National Judicial Leadership Summit

on the Protection of Children last September, judges, attorneys, court administrators, social workers and those involved in child protection got engaged and focused on collaborative efforts to improve outcomes for children. According to the latest data, since the passage of the Adoption and Safe Families Act, 340,000 children from the child welfare system have been adopted into safe, permanent homes. The steady increase in the number of adoptions and the current efforts directed toward court improvement are very encouraging.

However, 518,000 vulnerable children remain in foster care needing care and support. As many as 20,000 a year will “age out” of care without finding a permanent home. The statistics on outcomes for those young people are grim.

Additionally, the system is understaffed and under trained. Children linger too long before securing a safe and permanent home. More funding should be available for substance abuse treatment. During last month’s hearing on the meth epidemic we heard from Allison Bruno and the Noble family for whom long-term, residential, family treatment was an effective strategy for reunification.

I appreciate the good work on these issues by members of the Senate Finance Committee on the Democratic and the Republican side. These child welfare issues really do cut across the ideological divide. As always, I look forward to working with my friend and partner on the Finance Committee, Senator Baucus, to successfully reauthorize the Promoting Safe and Stable Families program and hopefully making some progress on consensus around the broader issues relative to child welfare.