

The Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008

Kids Are Waiting Bill Summary for PL 110-351

In 2004, the Pew Commission on Children in Foster Care issued its recommendations for overhauling and improving the nation's safety net for vulnerable children. As of December 2008, many of the financing recommendations issued by the Pew Commission have been enacted via the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act (H.R. 6893), and all of the court reforms are well underway in every state throughout the nation. Signed into law by President George W. Bush on October 7, 2008, Public Law 110-351 will improve the lives of children and youth in foster care and increase the likelihood that they will be able to leave the foster care system to live permanently with relative guardians or adoptive families. The law accomplishes this by extending and providing services for relatives, children in foster care, tribal nations, and adoptive families.

What does the law do for children currently in foster care?

- **Extends federal partnership of youth in foster care to age 21:** States have option to use federal funds to continue services and supports to older youth in foster care, guardianships, and adoptions until age 21.
- **Better prepares youth to leave foster care:** Requires each state to develop a personalized services plan for older youth leaving foster care.
- **Better educational outcomes:** Requires each state to ensure that children in foster care are enrolled full-time in school and improve their educational stability.
- **Better health outcomes:** Requires each state to develop a statewide plan to improve oversight and coordination of health services provided to children in foster care.
- **More siblings together:** Requires each state to make reasonable efforts to place siblings removed from their home in the same foster care or adoptive setting, unless doing so would be against their best interests.

How does the law help relative caregivers?

- **Limited financial assistance:** Each state has option to use federal funds to pay monthly cash assistance to relative caregivers who assume legal guardianship of children already living with them as foster care placements. These children will also receive medical insurance coverage.
- **Competitive grant resources:** \$15 million annually in competitive grants to support local community projects designed to better serve relative caregivers and the children in their care.
- **Better communication with relatives:** Requires states to provide notice to adult relatives of children removed from the custody of their parents and give them information on how they can participate in the placement and care of those children.
- **Quicker paths to caring for relative children:** states have option to waive non-safety related requirements for persons seeking to be licensed as foster parents so they can care for relative children.

How does the law benefit Tribal nations?

- **Direct access to federal foster care funds:** Provides tribal entities with access to federal foster care funds to directly operate child welfare programs serving the children, youth, and families in their community.

How does the law help adoptive families?

- **Rewards states for improvements:** Reforms and renews the Adoption Incentive Award program 9/30/13.
- **More children and families eligible for adoption support:** Gradually eliminates outdated eligibility requirements that restrict the use of federal funds for subsidies to families who adopt special needs children.
- **Better communication to families about tax incentives for adoption:** Requires each state to provide information about the availability of federal tax credits for adopting children from foster care.