

Brown-Stabenow Legislation

Senators Sherrod Brown & Debbie Stabenow

Across the nation, child welfare agencies are in crisis due to a lack of resources and high numbers of children entering the foster care system, many in need of behavioral and mental health services largely attributable to traumatic childhood experiences. For decades, most Federal child welfare funding became available to states only after children were removed from their families. Last year, Congress passed the Family First Prevention Services Act (Family First), landmark legislation that transforms the way the Federal government funds child welfare services. Family First prioritizes services that keep children safe, and whenever possible, with their families by allowing States to use Federal dollars for preventative measures like substance-use disorder treatment, mental health care, and in-home parenting skills. The legislation focuses on preventing as many children as possible from being removed from their homes, and where necessary, placing children in foster family homes or in quality group settings designed to meet the specific needs of the child. States need additional resources to ensure a seamless transition to Family First so that children and families in all jurisdictions are able to maximize the full potential of the law.

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Senators Brown and Stabenow are planning to introduce legislation that would provide States and territories with resources and funding flexibility to transition to Family First and enhance support for parents and relatives who are struggling to care for their children.

The Brown-Stabenow legislation would:

- Eliminate the outdated Federal Title IV-E foster eligibility requirements for foster family homes tied to the 1996 Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) law, commonly referred to as the “look back,” which limits Federal foster care support to only those children removed from very low-income families;
- Expand funding for kinship support services, including childcare, transportation, and legal services to ensure families have access to services that meet their needs and keep children safe in their homes;
- Provide states with more time to develop the research base for prevention programs they want to use by delaying the 50% well-supported requirement;
- Enhance funding for caseworker training and development;
- Provide additional funds for State-directed research to develop interventions to meet Family First evidenced-based requirements, strengthen families, improve service delivery for youth victims of trafficking, and reduce inter-generational poverty;
- Boost funding for Regional Partnership Grants to allow more local and regional groups to address parental substance use and child well-being;
- Enhance funding for the child welfare Court Improvement Program;
- Provide new time-limited resources to support quality foster parent recruitment and retention;
- Provide short-term Federal support to help States meet Family First licensing and accreditation standards for quality residential treatment programs and therapeutic foster care settings; and
- Provide additional resources and improvements for tribal child welfare programs.

If interested in learning more about this bill and cosponsoring please contact Shomari Figures (Shomari_Figures@brown.senate.gov), Shilesha Bamberg (Shilesha_Bamberg@brown.senate.gov), or Lorenzo Rubalcava (Lorenzo_Rubalcava@stabenow.senate.gov).