

The Invest in KIDS Act

A Draft Proposal By Representative Jim McDermott

With nearly three decades having passed since Congress embarked on a major overhaul of the Nation's child welfare system, the Invest in KIDS Act represents a bold new vision for ensuring the protection, permanency and well-being of America's most vulnerable children.

Providing Services to Strengthen Families	
Problem: There is too little focus on providing services to families. In fact, 40% of children who have been substantiated as victims of abuse and neglect receive no follow-up services.	Solution: The bill would create a new federal commitment to providing services to strengthen families and reduce abuse for States willing to share in the cost and demonstrate results.
Ensuring Foster Care for All Children in Need	
Problem: Federal eligibility criteria for foster care is outdated, and it is eroding coverage. In 1996, 54% of foster children received federal aid; in 2006, only 43% received assistance – cutting aid to over 50,000 children.	Solution: The legislation would end the income restriction on foster care assistance, making all abused and neglected children eligible. The federal match rate would be reduced to limit the cost of this expansion.
Supporting a Qualified Workforce	
Problem: The child welfare workforce is undertrained and overburdened. The average caseworker's tenure on the job is less than 2 years and their caseloads are twice the recommended levels.	Solution: The measure would extend new assistance for States to enact proven methods for improving the effectiveness of their workforce, including reducing caseloads.
Continuing Support for Older Youth	
Problem: 24,000 children “aged out” of the foster care system at 18 years of age with little support in 2005.	Solution: The legislation would help States extend assistance for foster children to the age of 21.
Helping Relatives Create Permanent Homes	
Problem: The federal government generally does not provide assistance to relatives who become legal guardians for foster children.	Solution: The bill would provide federal assistance to grandparents and other relatives who want to permanently care for foster children.

Draft Outline

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The Investment in Kids' Instruction, Development and Support Act

Title 1 Providing Services to Strengthen Families

Establish a new Child and Family Services Program to fund activities designed to: (1) safely reduce the number of children in foster care; (2) safely reduce the length of stay for children in foster care; (3) increase the percentage of foster children who are in family-like settings; and (4) improve the well-being of children in foster or adoptive families. State spending would be matched at the Medicaid match rate as long as a State demonstrates progress in improving outcomes for children.

Title 2 Ensuring Federal Foster Coverage for All Children in Need

Eliminate the current requirement that a child's birth parents must be eligible for cash welfare under the rules in place in 1996 in order for the child to be eligible for federal foster care assistance. Reduce the federal matching rate to offset most of the associated cost. Ensure that every State retains at least the same amount of funding as would occur under current law. Allow States to have separate foster care licensing standards for relatives. Permit direct foster care assistance for Tribes.

Title 3 Supporting a Qualified Child Welfare Workforce

Provide \$200 million per year for States to improve the ability of child welfare workers to ensure positive outcomes for children, with an emphasis on reducing caseloads per worker and increasing case worker training, retention and supervision. Expand the type of child welfare worker eligible for enhanced training funding.

Title 4 Connecting Children to Support, Family, Health Care, and School

Allow States to continue federal foster care coverage until the age of 21. Provide guardianship payments when relatives transition from foster parents to legal guardians. Authorize \$50 million per year for activities designed to connect foster children to relatives. Reauthorize and improve the Adoption Incentives program. Require reasonable efforts to place siblings together in foster care. Require States to develop plans to oversee and coordinate health care for foster children. Promote educational stability for children in foster care through improved planning and transportation assistance.