

Family Stability and Kinship Care Act

8/5/2015: Referred to Senate committee. Status: Read twice and referred to the Committee on Finance.

- On August 5, 2015, Senator Ron Wyden of Oregon introduced legislation, The Family Stability and Kinship Care Act, which would enable States to provide enhanced support to children and families and prevent foster care placements through the provision of time-limited family services and expanded kinship supports. Rep. Lloyd Doggett, Democrat from Texas, will introduce a companion bill in the House of Representatives.
- Under current law, Title IV-E of the Social Security Act, the nation's largest child welfare funding stream, provides states and tribes with a federal funding match for at-risk children only after they are placed in foster care.
- By contrast, the funding states receive for preventative services are limited.
- This enhances federal funding available under parts B and E of Title IV of the Social Security Act for prevention and family services to help keep children safe and supported at home with their parents or other family members, gives states and tribes the flexibility to adapt evidence-based family services to the specific needs of each family, and ensures that states and tribes are held accountable for allocating services in ways that maximize safety, permanency, and well-being for children, while minimizing the prevalence of lengthy foster care placements.
- Allows title IV-E reimbursement for time-limited (up to 12-months) family services (such as family skills training, family counseling, and concrete goods and services to stabilize a family in crisis) when those services are needed to prevent entry into foster care or allow children to safely exit foster care to family placements. Funding would also be available for extended family caring for kin and families after they reunify from foster care
- Defines eligible population as children identified as candidates for foster care (at imminent risk of entry into foster care) or who are in foster care, as well as to these children's family members. Provides reimbursement for these services without regard to the income of the child's biological parents.
- After a 3-year implementation phase, establishes national performance measures and outcomes-based reimbursement rates to target federal dollars to cost-effective services.
- Increases funding (by \$470 million per year) for community-based prevention and intervention services through the Promoting Safe and Stable Families (PSSF) Program in title IV-B.

- Requires research and technical assistance to ensure appropriate service delivery and prioritization of evidence-based prevention and post-permanency interventions.
- The legislation wouldn't require states to shift how they invest child-welfare money, but it would mean they have the flexibility to do so.
- Some advocates argued the one-year time limit for preventive services could lead to poor outcomes for families that have deep and chronic vulnerabilities, like ongoing mental-health issues or addiction. Those limits were kept in place, however, to reassure senators and representatives that spending won't mushroom. But many advocates believe that passing the bill will require considerably more compromise.
- The bill's supporters are awaiting an estimate of the measure's cost from the Congressional Budget Office before negotiations begin.