



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
April 23, 2012

CONTACT: [Julia Lawless](#), [Antonia Ferrier](#)
(202) 224-4515

**HATCH STATEMENT AT FINANCE COMMITTEE HEARING
EXAMINING AMERICA'S CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM**

Antwone Fisher Testifies on Foster Care Experience

WASHINGTON – U.S. Senator Orrin Hatch (R-Utah), Ranking Member of the Senate Finance Committee, today issued the following opening statement at a committee hearing examining the progress made and challenges remaining to improve the American child welfare system:

I want to welcome our very distinguished panel. Thank you for agreeing to be here today. Mr. Chairman, some in the media have characterized the Congress as dysfunctional and broken, irrevocably mired in conflict and partisanship. I disagree.

We do live in increasingly polarizing times. However, as this hearing will demonstrate, congressional efforts to increase positive outcomes for children and youth in foster care and in the child welfare system have been thoughtful, effective, and bipartisan.

Over the past seven years, the Senate Finance Committee has played a critical role in enacting three significant pieces of legislation designed to improve the child welfare system.

In 2006, the Committee developed Regional Partnership Grants to address issues associated with methamphetamine and other forms of substance abuse and addiction.

In 2008, the Committee worked to pass the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act, which was the most significant piece of child welfare legislation to be enacted in over a decade.

This legislation made it easier for families to adopt children out of foster care. It established a new pathway to permanence by giving relatives a separate legal status relative to children and youth formerly in foster care. It extended the option to states to provide foster care up to the age of 21.

The bill also updated the Adoption Incentives Program and established certain Family Connections Grants.

Both of these programs expire at the end of this fiscal year. I intend to work with you, Mr. Chairman, in our tradition of bipartisan collaboration in this area to find a way to extend these programs in a fiscally responsible manner.

Mr. Chairman, in the last session of Congress, you and I worked together to provide states with child welfare waivers so that they could develop innovative strategies to assist children and families.

I am very pleased that Utah was one of the first states to be awarded one of these waivers.

The purpose of today's hearing is to examine the experiences of Mr. Antwone Fisher who was in foster care during the 1970's. As many already know, Mr. Fisher's story was told in the movie, Antwone Fisher.

Many of the struggles Mr. Fisher endured during his time in foster care have been addressed through legislative efforts initiated by the Senate Finance Committee. Adoptions from foster care have been promoted. Family finding policies have been supported. Neglect in foster care has been addressed by policies to increase the number of caseworker visits.

But, as we will learn, Mr. Chairman, there is much the committee needs to do to build on these accomplishments.

The financing structure of our current child welfare system directs the majority of federal resources to the least desirable of outcomes: removing a child from his home and placing him with strangers.

We need to consider re-directing existing funding streams to promote policies that prevent children and youth from having to go into foster care in the first place. We also need to continue to support adoption and work to enable children and youth in foster care to establish a permanent relationship with a caring adult.

While in foster care, many children and young people are denied the opportunity to participate in athletics, drama or other school activities, attend social functions, go to camp, or even socialize with friends. In an effort to keep foster care children safe from harm, they are often denied access to healthy, age-appropriate activities and the opportunity to make and maintain meaningful connections.

A number of states are working to implement so-called normalizing policies. The federal government should work to follow the example of these states and enact normalizing policies on the federal level.

Every year 26,000 young people turn eighteen and are then emancipated from the child welfare system. In many cases this means they are told to gather their few belongings and

place them in a trash bag just before a caseworker drives them to a homeless shelter. Too often these children who "age out," of foster care become homeless, incarcerated, addicted to drugs and sexually trafficked.

Mr. Chairman, we simply cannot continue sending thousands of youths out to fend for themselves on the streets. We can and we must do better by these young people. I look forward to hearing from our witnesses. Thank you, once again, Mr. Chairman for holding this hearing.

###