

# Family Services & Foster Care Legislative Proposal

Senator Ron Wyden

## Summary

Our Federal child welfare financing system gives states little incentive to invest in prevention and family services that help keep children safely at home. Title IV-E of the Social Security Act, the Nation's largest child welfare funding stream, currently provides States and Indian Tribes with a Federal funding match for children only after they are placed in foster care. At the same time, current Federal funding for broad, community-based, primary prevention programs through title IV-B is too limited to reach the significant number of families in need. In contrast, State and Tribal innovations implemented through child welfare waivers suggest that permitting spending for front end prevention and family services can help reduce the prevalence and length of foster care placements while maintaining or improving safety and permanency outcomes for children.

This bill expands 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, give States and Indian Tribes the flexibility to adapt evidence-based family services to the specific needs of each family, and ensure that States and Tribes are held accountable for allocating services in ways that maximize safety and permanency for children, while minimizing the prevalence of long foster care placements.

### **Key Components of the Bill:**

- Expands federal reimbursement under Title IV-E to time-limited (up to 12-months) family services such as parenting skills training, family counseling, tutoring and mentoring programs, and concrete goods and services to stabilize a family in times of crisis.
- Allows States and Tribes to seek reimbursement for these family services on behalf of children identified as candidates for foster care (at imminent risk of entry) 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 benchmark measures and outcomes-based reimbursement rates to help target federal dollars to cost-effective programs and 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, while incorporating a requirement that the majority of these funds be used on evidence-based programs known to produce good outcomes for children, families, and taxpayers.
- Provides funding for research and technical assistance to inform States and Tribes' use of family services under IV-E (\$2.5 million per year), as well as funding for research and technical assistance to identify additional evidence-based prevention and post-permanency interventions (\$4 million per year).