



SUMMARY

FOSTERING CONNECTIONS TO SUCCESS AND INCREASING ADOPTIONS ACT

In October 2008, the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act (P.L. 110-351) was signed into law. Fostering Connections represents the most significant federal child welfare legislation in more than a decade. The Act provides for the creation or extension of critical programs and services benefiting children currently in foster care, youth emancipating or “aging out” of the system, relative guardians, foster and adoptive families, and Native American tribes.

For children and youth in foster care, Fostering Connections will:

- **Extend federal support for youth in foster care to age 21**
Fostering Connections allows states the option to use federal funds to continue to provide supports and services to qualifying youth who are in foster care, guardianships and adoptions until age 21.
- **Better equip youth exiting foster care for a successful transition to adulthood**
The law requires that states work with youth emancipating from foster care to develop detailed personal services plans.
- **Keep more siblings together**
The act requires states and child welfare agencies to make “reasonable efforts” to place siblings who enter foster care with the same foster, relative or adoptive family, unless doing so would violate the children’s best interests.
- **Promote and improve educational stability**
The law compels state child welfare agencies to coordinate with educational agencies to ensure that children are enrolled in school full-time and can remain in the same school whenever possible.
- **Achieve better health outcomes**
Fostering Connections requires states to develop a comprehensive plan to improve oversight, continuity and coordination of health services for children in foster care.

For relatives caring for children in foster care, Fostering Connections will:

- **Enable use of federal funds to provide support to kinship caregivers**
Fostering Connections grants states the option to use existing federal funds to provide financial assistance to relative guardians who assume permanent legal guardianship of the foster children in their care.
- **Ensure better communication to relatives**
The law requires state agencies to notify all adult relatives within 30 days after a child enters foster care, and enable these relatives to participate in the child’s care. Additionally, the law provides funds for Kinship Navigator programs, to help connect relatives caring for children with needed supports and services.



- **Waive non-safety licensing standards**

On a case-by-case basis, the law allows states to waive non-safety licensing standards in order to eliminate roadblocks in placing children safely with relatives.

For birth parents and relatives of children in foster care, Fostering Connections will:

- **Create new Family Connection Grants**

The Act establishes grants for programs designed to help families remain together, ensure that children can reunite with their parents quickly and safely, or enable them to join permanent families with relatives, including family group decision-making, intensive family finding activities, and residential family-based substance abuse treatment.

For adoptive and prospective adoptive families, Fostering Connections will:

- **Increase the likelihood that more children with special needs will be adopted from foster care**

Fostering Connections gradually eliminates the link between federal adoption assistance eligibility and the outdated AFDC income requirement for children in foster care with special needs. By FY 2018, all children with special needs who enter foster care will be eligible for federal assistance regardless of their birth parents' income.

- **Expand and reauthorize the adoption incentive program**

This program provides states with a financial inducement to increase the number of children adopted from foster care annually each year. The revised program gives states twenty-four months to spend incentive payments, doubles per child incentive amounts, and resets the baseline from which states measure adoption increases.

For Native American tribes and tribal governments, Fostering Connections will:

- **Extend Title IV-E funding directly to tribal governments**

For too many years, tribes could only obtain second-hand financial support from their state(s) for child welfare services. The new law permits tribes that operate child welfare programs to receive federal funding directly, just as states do. The law additionally requires the Department of Health and Human Services to provide technical assistance to ensure that tribes can implement services to help improve the lives and outcomes of children, youth and families.

For child welfare and court personnel, Fostering Connections will:

- **Make federal dollars available for training**

Fostering Connections expands the use of federal child welfare training funds, currently only available to staff in public agencies, to include court personnel, private agency workers, attorneys, relative caregivers and others representing, caring for and working with children in the nation's child welfare system.