



Date

Colorado Congressional Delegate Name
US House of Representatives or US Senate
Address
Washington DC

Dear Senator / Congressman / Congresswoman:

Colorado Counties, Inc. (CCI) writes to you today on a timely matter of great importance to Colorado Counties—the need to maintain flexibility in child welfare spending in Colorado. Colorado’s work over the last several years demonstrates that this flexibility both better serves children and is a more cost effective use of Federal funds. This flexibility, through the IV-E Waiver, is set to expire in September 2019. We hope you will prioritize either 1) the timely passage of the Families First Act (H.R.253) with amendments or 2) the extension of the child welfare Federal IV-E Waivers.

Beginning in July, 2013, Colorado began a 5 year Title IV-E Waiver demonstration project aimed at improving the safety, permanency, and well-being of child welfare-involved children and youth. While Federal IV-E dollars are normally spent exclusively on foster care, the Waiver allows participating counties to redirect this funding towards child abuse prevention and family reunification efforts. Data from the interim evaluation of the Waiver demonstrates that, among the counties who have participated in the Waiver, there has been a decrease in the use of congregate care and foster care, which research proves results in better outcomes for children, including increased safety and permanency for children. In addition, participating counties saw a 16% reduction in out-of-home expenditures during the first two years of the Waiver and a 15% decrease in average daily unit cost for out-of-home placement days. These reductions can largely be attributed to a shift from higher cost foster and congregate care placements to lower cost relative and kinship care placements.

As our IV-E waivers may come to an end in 2019, counties, staff, community partners, and most importantly, the families we serve, are left with a great deal of uncertainty about how we will maintain the innovative practices and reforms that have been adopted. This uncertainty may cause the state and counties to prematurely phase out these innovative practices that rely on this funding. The critical progress Colorado has made in the prevention of child abuse and neglect and the safety and permanency of children will be slowed if Congress does not act quickly to either pass the Families First Act or extend the availability of IV-E Waivers. The National Association of Counties (NACo) has also passed a unanimous resolution urging Congress to maintain county child welfare flexibility and funding.

Pass the Families First Act with Amendments

CCI urges Congress to pass an amended version of the Family First prevention Services Act so that human services departments can maintain the funding flexibility necessary to prevent child abuse and neglect and appropriately serve our most vulnerable children. We encourage you to work with state and county human services departments to amend the bill so that it would not shift increased costs to states and counties by denying Title IV-E eligibility to children who would remain eligible for state or county-funded foster care and adoption assistance. In doing so, Congress should also provide states and counties with sufficient flexibility to serve and protect abused and neglected children as done currently under some state laws. CCI further urges that the bill's provisions intended to reduce the use of congregate care be amended so that states and counties already proceeding with similar efforts may continue to do so. Finally, CCI opposes any congressional effort to block grant IV-E foster care financing.

-OR-

Extend the Child Welfare IV-E Waivers:

CCI supports federal legislation to allow for an extension of the Federal IV-E Waiver until September 30, 2024. CCI is seeking an amendment to Sec. 1130 [42 U.S.C. 1320a-9], Authority to Approve Demonstration Projects. That current law has a Termination of Authority clause, reading "In no event shall a demonstration project under this section be conducted after September 30, 2019."

If a resolution to extend Federal IV-E Waivers is not passed much of the state innovation will come to an end and children and families will be negatively impacted. We do not want to see children return to costly out-of-home care that results in worse outcomes and we hope you will join us in addressing this critical need.

Thank you for your consideration of this important matter. Flexibility in the use of federal child welfare funding has a direct impact on our ability to best serve the most vulnerable children and families in Colorado. If you have any questions or would like further clarification, please do not hesitate to contact our Legislative Director, Gini Pingenot, at gpingenot@ccionline.org or 303.861.4076, Ext. 226.

Sincerely,



Nancy Sharpe
Arapahoe County Commissioner
CCI Health & Human Services, Chair



Wendy Buxton-Andrade
Prowers County Commissioner
CCI Health & Human Services, Vice Chair