



Illinois Department of Children and Family Services encourages speedy passage of H.R.5456

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SPRINGFIELD, Ill. – The U.S. House of Representatives this week approved H.R. 5456, the Family First Prevention Services Act, to give Illinois and other states substantially more flexibility and federal support to keep families together and avoid reliance on foster care. The Illinois Department of Children and Family Services stands in strong support of this legislation.

"This landmark legislation, years in the making, will help the Department achieve its primary goal of effectively working with families and children in crisis to prevent children from entering foster care," said Department of Children and Family Services Director George Sheldon in a letter to the Illinois Congressional Delegation. "This legislation is not only good for children and families, but for federal and state budgets as well. The evidence of what works in child welfare is almost universal in focusing on early intervention. Over the long term, evidence-based prevention services reduce the need for costly, long-term foster care and will improve outcomes for children and families."

The legislation is a dramatic change in federal support for states' child welfare programs. For decades, the federal government has shared the cost of children in foster care but has offered little support for programs that help keep children out of foster care by helping troubled families. The new legislation provides federal matching dollars for programs that preserve families.

The legislation also limits state reliance on long-term residential treatment facilities rather than community-based family-type placements, including foster homes. The Illinois Department of Children and Family Services has been implementing this under the Rauner Administration by gradually transferring 350 children and youth to group homes and foster care.

The Family First Prevention Act was introduced on Friday, June 10, 2016 with strong bipartisan support. Ranking Republicans and Democrats on the House Ways and Means Committee and the Senate Finance Committee of Congress led the effort. On Tuesday, June 21, the House of Representatives passed H.R. 5456 without opposition. The legislation now moves to the U.S. Senate.