

Family First Act: Core Messaging Document

This document outlines topline messages designed to help communicate the Family First Act with key stakeholders and the public.

ELEVATOR PITCH:

The Family First Act presents an **unprecedented opportunity** to give child welfare systems the tools they need to make transformative changes that **strengthen families** so more **children can remain safely with their parents and kinship caregivers**.

ELEVATOR PITCH SUPPORTING POINTS (SUMMARIZED TOPLINES):

1. Kids deserve to grow up in families;
2. With the Family First Act, we have an opportunity to modernize the child welfare system and move toward a public health approach that strengthens families and proactively supports those at risk of abuse, neglect, and separation from their family;
3. We can do that by using Family First to focus investments on solutions that would keep more children safe and keep families together;
4. Success will require everybody – everyone with a stake in the child welfare system (including young people, birth and foster parents, child welfare professionals, policy makers and courts) should have a seat at the table.

STYLE:

Always use “Family First Act” to describe the legislation, instead of Family First Prevention Services Act. Subsequent use may be “Family First.” Do not use “FFPSA”, “FFA”, or other acronyms. Stating “Family First” consistently leads with the vision and intent of the legislation.

TOPLINE MESSAGING:

All children deserve the opportunity to grow up in safe, stable and nurturing families. The Family First Act represents a historic step toward better aligning federal child welfare policy with this critical vision for our nation’s children and families.

- Children and youth do best in a strong family and families.
- Children, youth and families in crisis do best with support from their communities.
- Kids of all ages need close family relationships to develop and grow. Research has shown that the trauma that accompanies family separation, often results in a lifetime of emotional and psychological problems. (Sacks, 2018)
- Children and youth can grow up in their own homes, and families can be kept together, when caregivers have access to treatment and support services that improve their ability to safely care for their kids.
- Before Family First, federal child welfare investment was limited to placing a child in foster care after neglect or harm already occurred. Family First supports early intervention and evidence-based programs that help keep families together, aligning with broad public support for investing in children and youth, preventing child abuse and neglect, and engaging local communities in services and programs for children and families.

The Family First Act helps to prevent abuse and neglect by expanding the child welfare system’s focus and resources with supportive services that recognize the critical role families play in ensuring the safety and well-being of children.

- The Family First Act is the first major modernization of the child welfare system in decades, presenting an opportunity to respond to the specific needs of children, teens and families in crisis.
- Family First provides long-overdue federal investment in prevention for children and families at risk of entering the foster care system.. It supports evidence-based prevention efforts for mental health and substance abuse prevention, as well as treatment services and in-home parent skill-based services that narrows the number of children and families who enter the child welfare system, in part by targeting those at greatest risk.
 - Family First will help more parents and their children grow up in a safe home and ensure that they have the support they need to address physical and emotional trauma.

- Similarly, Family First makes support available for parents who have a mental illness or who would benefit from in-home parenting services.
- Family First offers states and tribes access to additional federal funding which supports extended family members caring for children. Maintaining this critical bond helps ensure a child can build a foundation for future learning and health.

The Family First Act is an opportunity to invest more resources in strengthening families and keeping children safe from harm, helping families remain together, and when foster care is required, ensuring that children are placed in the least restrictive, most family-like setting appropriate to their needs.

- Family First marks a significant step toward strengthening families by providing jurisdictions with new federal resources for all families to access evidence-based support services such as addiction treatment, mental health services and parental skill building that help children remain safely at home.
- Family First makes available, for the first time, significant federal dollars to states and tribes to address the root causes that are putting children in foster care.
 - Before Family First, states and tribes could only use the bulk of federal child welfare investments for placing a child in foster care after they had suffered harm. This was the case despite research confirming a number of evidence-based interventions could help keep children safely with their own families.
- For children and teens who cannot remain at home with their parents, Family First offers additional support for evidence-based Kinship Navigator programs that links relative caregivers to a broad range of services and supports to help children remain safely with them.
- Family First emphasizes the importance of children being placed in the least restrictive, family-like setting appropriate to a child's needs, and when foster care is needed, Family First allows federal reimbursement for care in family-based settings.

The successful implementation of the Family First Act begins in-earnest in October 2019. The transformation of the child welfare system will require the active participation of everyone in the child welfare community, and we must all do our part to ensure we are transforming the system to meet the needs of our children and support and strengthen families

- The Family First Act is an opportunity – but strong federal, state, tribal, and local stakeholder collaboration are key to its success.
- Successful implementation requires engaging the advocates who pushed for passage of the Family First Act – young people, parents, and relatives with first-hand experience in the foster care system. These constituents must be invited, consulted and meaningfully engaged as the law is implemented.
- We can all play a role in the successful implementation of the Family First Act:
 - Child welfare leaders and professionals need to bring their expertise and urgency to act back to their jurisdictions;
 - Public health and mental health professionals should be prepared to participate, adapt, and offer insight into how to design a system that best serves children and families;
 - Courts and the judiciary system need to listen and adapt best practices to protect vulnerable youth, and keep families together;
 - Policymakers should be prepared to collaborate on solutions that modernize child welfare services;
 - Advocates, businesses, nonprofits and local leaders all must raise their hands and engage to truly transform child welfare in their communities.
- We must remember that Family First Act is a first step in ensuring our child welfare system is working for kids and families. In order to serve those who are disproportionately impacted by the current child welfare system, and to consider the specific culturally-adapted services we need to serve every community, we need to continue to listen, learn, and proactively engage and invite everyone to the table.

Partner Collaboration: Generations United, Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute, FosterClub, American Bar Association, Chapin Hall, National Indian Child Welfare Association, Annie E. Casey, National Alliance of Children's Trust & Prevention Funds, Youth Law Center, American Academy of Pediatrics, and Casey Family Programs.
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