

Extending and Expanding Adoption & Guardianship Subsidies

Extending Adoption and Guardianship Subsidies until Age 21 and Expanding Guardianship Subsidies to Include Foster Parents Will Remove Barriers to Adoption and Guardianship and Save Millions of Dollars

INTRODUCTION: *The District finds permanent homes for far too few foster children.*

When foster children cannot return to their parents, the District must find a permanent home with kin or others. But DC has failed to find permanent homes for hundreds of foster children, especially teenagers, and the problem is getting worse. Strong action is needed to reverse this trend.

THE PROBLEM: *The District's subsidy policies pose barriers to adoption and guardianship*

- **Financial support ends before children are financially independent.** Adoption and guardianship subsidies end when a child turns 18,¹ even though:
 - Foster children and their foster parents can continue to receive foster care subsidies until age 21. The disparity between foster care subsidies and adoption and guardianship subsidies creates a perverse incentive to remain in foster care.
 - Child support obligations, under District law, continue until age 21²
 - Many foster youth do not graduate high school by the age of 18, let alone achieve financial independence. Foster children have disproportionately high rates of educational delays, mental illness, and special needs.³ Most foster children need support past age 18.
- **The District does not provide good options for children who want to live with their foster parents while maintaining birth family connections.** Some children, especially older children, do not want to be adopted. Foster parents who become guardians give foster children permanency without severing the legal tie to the birth family. DC law does not currently allow guardianship subsidies to non-kinship foster parents.

THE SOLUTION: Pass legislation extending adoption and guardianship subsidies to age 21 and expanding guardianship subsidies to cover all foster parents. That will:

- **Promote adoption and guardianship,** helping move children out of foster care and into permanent homes and eliminating financial incentives to keep children in foster care.
- **Support families** taking care of the District's most vulnerable children and youth.
- **Respect the complex relationships** formed by children in the foster care system, including the relationships that remain between foster children and their birth families.

SIGNIFICANT IMPACT, SIGNIFICANT SAVINGS: Subsidy extensions and expansions are good for children and for the District's bottom line.

- **Catalyze hundreds more adoptions and guardianships.** A study of DC's foster care system concluded that extending and expanding subsidies would lead to 110 - 190 new adoptions and guardianships *every year*.⁴ A national study shows that states that extend subsidies to age 21 recruit many more adoptive families.⁵
- **Save millions of dollars.** When a child leaves foster care for adoption or guardianship, DC saves tens of thousands of dollars. Extending and expanding subsidies will save the District millions of dollars over the next five years.⁶



¹ D.C. Code §§ 4-301(e) & 16-2399(d)

² *Butler v. Butler*, 496 A.2d 621 (D.C. 1985).

³ Peter Pecora *et al.*, *Improving family foster care: Findings from the Northwest Foster Care Alumni Study* 32-34, <http://www.casey.org/Resources/Publications/NorthwestAlumniStudy.htm>; Mary Bruce Webb *et al.*, *Addressing the Educational Needs of Children in Child Welfare Services*, in *Child Protection: Using Research to Improve Policy and Practice* 253 (2007).

⁴ Mary Eschelbach Hansen & Josh Gupta-Kagan, *Extending and Expanding Adoption and Guardianship Subsidies for Children and Youth in the District of Columbia Foster Care System: Fiscal Impact Analysis* (2009).

⁵ Mary Eschelbach Hansen & Josh Gupta-Kagan, *Raising the Cut-Off: The Empirical Case for Extending Adoption and Guardianship Subsidies from Age 18 to 21*, 13 U.C. Davis J. of Juv. L. & Pol'y 1 (2009).

⁶ Mary Eschelbach Hansen & Josh Gupta-Kagan, *Extending and Expanding Adoption and Guardianship Subsidies for Children and Youth in the District of Columbia Foster Care System: Fiscal Impact Analysis* (2009).