



Dear Senator,

For generations, America has quietly carried a population of more than 400,000 children inside a system that is well-intentioned, but structurally vulnerable to neglect, abuse, and silence. These children rarely appear in our national consciousness except as stereotypes — troubled, dangerous, or broken — shaped by television and film rather than by truth. In reality, they are children who have been failed, not children who have failed.

I know this because I was one of them.

From age one until eighteen, I lived in foster care. Like many foster youth, I learned early that the greatest danger was not always the removal itself, but the powerlessness that followed. When a child has no phone, no hotline, no rights education, no oversight, and no meaningful access to help, they become easy to intimidate and easy to harm. Predators thrive in silence, and silence is built into the current structure.

The Foster Child Safety, Accountability, and Family Preservation Act is designed to change that.

This Act does not attack the system; it strengthens it. It does not blame social workers; it supports them. It does not dismantle foster care; it modernizes it. Most importantly, it restores power to the one person who has historically had none: **the child**.

The Act establishes:

- A **three-digit national hotline** every foster child can call, text, or message — a public campaign as recognizable as “Only you can prevent forest fires,” “This is your brain on drugs,” or “Just say no.”
- A **government-funded mobile device** for every foster youth age 12 and older, ensuring they can reach help when they need it.
- **Independent vetting** of foster homes, so no agency is responsible for policing itself.
- **Rights education** for youth 12 and up, so they know how to report abuse, speak in court, access their attorney, and prepare for emancipation.
- **Limits on immunity** for professionals who engage in willful misconduct or retaliation.
- **Kinship placement priority**, so children can remain with safe family whenever possible.
- A comprehensive **Foster Child Bill of Rights**, enforceable and publicly posted.

These reforms are not abstract. They are practical, achievable, and urgently needed. When adults know a child has a phone, a hotline, legal knowledge, and independent oversight, the entire culture shifts. The message becomes clear:

- **This child is protected.**
- **This child is not alone.**
- **This child can report you.**

That alone prevents harm.

I am submitting this Act not as a theorist, but as someone who lived the consequences of a system without these protections. I believe we can build a foster care structure that is safe, accountable, and worthy of the children it serves. This legislation is a step toward that future.

Thank you for your consideration and for your commitment to the well-being of America's most vulnerable youth.

Sincerely,

Jessica Holter

THE FOSTER CHILD SAFETY, ACCOUNTABILITY, AND FAMILY PRESERVATION ACT

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act shall be known as the “Foster Child Safety, Accountability, and Family Preservation Act.”

SECTION 2. LEGISLATIVE FINDINGS.

The Legislature finds that:

1. Children in foster care have the right to safety, dignity, and protection from abuse, neglect, and exploitation.
2. Existing reporting mechanisms for foster youth are inconsistent, inaccessible, or ineffective, leaving many children without a safe means to report harm.
3. Accountability systems for placement decisions, case management, and legal representation vary widely, and immunity provisions may limit oversight.
4. Placement with biological family members, when safe and appropriate, supports stability, cultural continuity, and long-term well-being.
5. Early access to career and technical education expands opportunity, reduces long-term economic instability, and supports youth—particularly those in foster care or at risk of system involvement—in building sustainable futures.
6. Foster children often lack clearly defined, enforceable rights necessary to ensure their safety, well-being, and long-term development.
7. Strengthening safety reporting, professional accountability, family-based placement options, early workforce development, and explicit rights protections serves the best interests of children and supports long-term community stability.

SECTION 3. DEFINITIONS.

For purposes of this Act:

1. “Foster child” or “foster youth” means any individual under the age of 21 placed in state-supervised foster care.

2. “Placement professional” means any social worker, case manager, guardian ad litem, placement attorney, or contracted agency representative involved in foster care placement decisions.
3. “Kinship placement” means placement with a biological family member or extended relative, when deemed safe and appropriate.
4. “Hotline” means the national, 24-hour reporting system established under this Act.
5. “Trade school” means a federally funded institution providing accredited vocational or technical education.

TITLE I — NATIONAL FOSTER CHILD SAFETY HOTLINE

SECTION 4. ESTABLISHMENT OF A NATIONAL HOTLINE.

4(a) Creation.

A national, 24-hour, toll-free hotline shall be established for foster children to confidentially report abuse, neglect, unsafe placements, or violations of their rights.

4(b) Accessibility.

The hotline shall:

1. Be staffed by trained professionals with expertise in child welfare and trauma-informed response.
2. Provide phone, text, and online chat options.
3. Be accessible to youth with disabilities and youth with limited English proficiency.
4. Guarantee anonymity upon request.

4(c) Response Requirements.

Reports received through the hotline shall trigger:

1. Immediate safety assessment protocols.
2. Notification to the appropriate state oversight body.
3. Documentation and tracking for federal review.

TITLE II — ACCOUNTABILITY FOR PLACEMENT PROFESSIONALS

SECTION 5. OVERSIGHT AND IMMUNITY LIMITATIONS.

5(a) Federal Oversight.

A federal oversight mechanism shall be established to review placement decisions, case management practices, and professional conduct.

5(b) Immunity Limitations.

Immunity protections for placement professionals shall not apply in cases involving:

1. Gross negligence,
2. Willful misconduct,
3. Failure to report abuse,
4. Retaliation against foster youth who report harm.

5(c) Corrective Action.

The oversight body may recommend:

1. Mandatory retraining,
2. Suspension of duties,
3. Revocation of licensure,
4. Referral for legal or administrative action.

TITLE III — INCENTIVES FOR BIOLOGICAL FAMILY PLACEMENT

SECTION 6. KINSHIP PLACEMENT PRIORITY AND SUPPORT.

6(a) Priority.

When safe and appropriate, kinship placement shall be prioritized over non-relative foster placement.

6(b) Support and Incentives.

To encourage and sustain kinship placements, the Act shall provide:

1. Financial support equal to or greater than standard foster care stipends.
2. Access to training, case management, and mental health resources.
3. Housing assistance when necessary to maintain placement stability.
4. Streamlined approval processes for qualified relatives.

6(c) Reporting.

States shall annually report:

1. The number of kinship placements,
2. The duration and stability of such placements,
3. Barriers preventing kinship placement,
4. Recommendations for improvement.

TITLE IV — FREE GOVERNMENT-FUNDED TRADE SCHOOLS BEGINNING AT AGE 15

SECTION 7. ESTABLISHMENT OF TRADE SCHOOLS.

7(a) Creation.

A federally funded system of public trade schools shall be established to provide career and technical education beginning at age 15 for eligible youth.

7(b) Eligibility.

Eligibility for enrollment shall include:

1. Foster children,
2. Youth at risk of entering the foster care system,
3. Youth experiencing homelessness,
4. Youth from underserved or economically disadvantaged communities,
5. Any student who elects to pursue a trade-based educational pathway beginning at age 15.

7(c) Tuition and Costs.

All tuition, fees, materials, equipment, and certification costs shall be fully funded by federal appropriations.

7(d) Program Requirements.

Trade schools established under this Act shall provide:

1. Accredited vocational and technical training programs,
2. Apprenticeship pathways in partnership with local industries,
3. Career counseling and job placement services,
4. Trauma-informed educational support for foster youth,
5. Transportation assistance for enrolled students,
6. Evening and weekend program options.

7(e) Workforce Integration.

Programs shall prepare students for immediate entry into the workforce through:

1. Industry-recognized certifications,
2. Paid apprenticeships where available,
3. Partnerships with unions, trade organizations, and employers,
4. Opportunities for continued education or advanced training.

7(f) Oversight and Reporting.

The Department of Education, in coordination with the Department of Labor and the Department of Health and Human Services, shall:

1. Oversee program implementation,
2. Monitor enrollment and completion rates,
3. Track employment outcomes,
4. Report annually to Congress on program effectiveness and equity.

TITLE V — IMPLEMENTATION, FUNDING, AND EFFECTIVE DATE

SECTION 8. IMPLEMENTATION AND ENFORCEMENT.

1. The Department of Health and Human Services shall oversee implementation of Titles I–III.
2. The Department of Education and Department of Labor shall oversee Title IV.
3. States shall comply with federal standards as a condition of receiving child welfare funding.
4. Annual audits shall be conducted to ensure compliance.

SECTION 9. FUNDING.

Funding for this Act shall be provided through federal appropriations designated for child welfare reform, education, and workforce development.

SECTION 10. EFFECTIVE DATE.

This Act shall take effect one year after enactment.

TITLE VI — FOSTER CHILD BILL OF RIGHTS

SECTION 11. ESTABLISHMENT OF RIGHTS.

Every foster child shall be guaranteed the rights enumerated in this Title. These rights shall be enforceable, publicly posted, and provided in age-appropriate language to every foster child upon entry into care and annually thereafter.

SECTION 12. RIGHT TO SAFETY AND PROTECTION.

Foster children shall have the right to:

1. Live in a safe, stable, and abuse-free home.
2. Immediate removal from any placement deemed unsafe.
3. Regular unannounced safety checks by trained personnel.
4. Protection from physical, emotional, and sexual abuse, neglect, exploitation, and trafficking.

SECTION 13. RIGHT TO REPORT ABUSE WITHOUT RETALIATION.

Foster children shall have the right to:

1. Report abuse, neglect, or unsafe conditions through the national hotline or any other reporting mechanism.
2. Confidential or anonymous reporting.
3. Protection from retaliation by caregivers, agencies, or placement professionals.
4. Independent investigation of all reports.

SECTION 14. RIGHT TO FAMILY CONNECTION.

Foster children shall have the right to:

1. Placement with safe biological family members or extended relatives whenever possible and appropriate.
2. Have their preferences regarding placement considered, documented, and presented to the court.
3. Be asked, in an age-appropriate and trauma-informed manner, who they feel safe living with.
4. Maintain relationships with siblings, including placement together when appropriate.
5. Maintain contact with extended family unless restricted for safety reasons.
6. Receive support for kinship caregivers to maintain placement stability.

SECTION 15. RIGHT TO EDUCATION AND OPPORTUNITY.

Foster children shall have the right to:

1. Immediate school enrollment when moved.
2. Stable school placement whenever possible.
3. Access to tutoring, extracurricular activities, and necessary technology.

4. Enrollment in government-funded trade schools beginning at age 15.
5. Access to paid internships, workforce development, and career counseling.

SECTION 16. RIGHT TO MENTAL AND EMOTIONAL HEALTH SUPPORT.

Foster children shall have the right to:

1. Trauma-informed mental health services.
2. Crisis intervention and emergency counseling.
3. Grief and loss counseling.
4. Regular mental health screenings.

SECTION 17. RIGHT TO BE HEARD.

Foster children shall have the right to:

1. Participate in decisions affecting their lives in an age-appropriate manner.
2. Speak privately with their attorney or advocate.
3. Express concerns about placement without fear of retaliation.
4. Request a placement change when necessary for safety or well-being.

SECTION 18. RIGHT TO STABILITY.

Foster children shall have the right to:

1. A minimum number of placement moves, except when required for safety.
2. Advance notice before placement changes whenever possible.
3. A transition plan for each move.
4. A long-term permanency plan developed with their input.

SECTION 19. RIGHT TO PERSONAL BELONGINGS AND IDENTITY.

Foster children shall have the right to:

1. Keep personal belongings, clothing, and items of sentimental value.
2. Maintain cultural, religious, and community ties.
3. Access their own records at an appropriate age.

4. Possess essential documents, including identification, Social Security card, and birth certificate, upon aging out.

SECTION 20. RIGHT TO TRANSITION SUPPORT.

Foster children aging out of care shall have the right to:

1. Safe and stable housing.
2. Financial literacy training.
3. Continued access to healthcare.
4. Extended foster care options.
5. A personalized transition plan developed with the youth.

SECTION 21. RIGHT TO DIGITAL ACCESS AND COMMUNICATION.

Foster children shall have the right to:

1. Age-appropriate access to the internet and digital communication tools necessary for education, social connection, and personal safety.
2. Maintain supervised or monitored social media use consistent with individualized safety plans.
3. Clear, written explanations of any restrictions placed on their digital access.
4. Appeal or request review of digital access restrictions through their attorney or advocate.
5. Confidential access to the national foster child hotline and other approved reporting mechanisms.
6. A government-funded mobile device with calling, texting, and internet capability beginning at age 12, or earlier when necessary for safety or communication with family, attorneys, or service providers.
7. Protection from retaliation for using digital tools to seek help, report concerns, or communicate with authorized individuals.

TITLE VII — INDEPENDENT VETTING AND SAFETY VERIFICATION

SECTION 22. INDEPENDENT VETTING OF FOSTER HOMES.

All foster homes shall be subject to independent safety verification conducted by an entity that is not:

1. The placing agency,
2. The foster family agency or contractor receiving payment for the placement,
3. Any individual or organization with a financial interest in the placement outcome.

SECTION 23. REQUIREMENTS FOR INDEPENDENT VETTING.

Independent vetting shall include:

1. Background checks for all adults residing in or regularly present in the home.
2. Verification of living conditions, safety standards, and capacity to meet the child's needs.
3. Unannounced home visits conducted at least twice annually.
4. A written report submitted directly to the state oversight body and made available to the child's attorney.

SECTION 24. PROHIBITION ON UNVETTED ADULTS.

No foster child shall reside in a home where any adult has not undergone and passed required background checks.

TITLE VIII — RIGHTS EDUCATION FOR YOUTH AGE 12 AND OVER

SECTION 25. RIGHT TO LEGAL AND LIFE SKILLS EDUCATION.

Foster youth age 12 and older shall receive annual, age-appropriate instruction on:

1. Their rights within the foster care system,
2. How to report abuse or unsafe conditions,
3. How to request a placement change,
4. How to communicate with their attorney or advocate,
5. Court processes and how to participate in hearings,
6. Financial literacy and budgeting,
7. Obtaining identification and essential documents,
8. Housing readiness and independent living skills,
9. Planning for early emancipation or extended foster care.

SECTION 26. DELIVERY OF EDUCATION.

Instruction shall be provided:

1. By trained professionals independent of the placing agency,
2. In schools, group homes, foster homes, or community settings,
3. In formats accessible to youth with disabilities or limited English proficiency.

SECTION 27. DOCUMENTATION.

Completion of rights education shall be documented annually and included in the youth's case file.

TITLE IX — NATIONAL FOSTER CHILD SAFETY HOTLINE

SECTION 28. ESTABLISHMENT OF A THREE-DIGIT NATIONAL HOTLINE.

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) shall designate a three-digit national hotline number for foster children to report abuse, neglect, unsafe placements, or violations of their rights.

SECTION 29. REQUIREMENTS FOR HOTLINE NUMBER.

The hotline number shall be:

1. Easy to remember,
2. Accessible nationwide,
3. Available by phone, text, and online chat,
4. Staffed by trained professionals with expertise in child welfare and trauma-informed response.

SECTION 30. PROTECTION FROM RETALIATION.

Reports made through the hotline shall be confidential, and foster children shall be protected from retaliation by caregivers, agencies, or placement professionals.