



September 22, 2023

Dear Congressional Leader:

I'm pleased to share the newly-released [Policy Framework](#) from the [National Association of Counsel for Children](#) (NACC). Co-designed with NACC's expert staff, national membership community, and [12-member lived experience Advisory Council](#), this document reaffirms our founding commitment to high-quality legal representation in child protection court proceedings and pledges our time and resources to policy reform that will enhance youth voice, race equity, and family integrity.

As you will see, we urge lawmakers to focus on five key priorities: (1) Establishing a Right to Counsel in Child Protection Proceedings; (2) Ensuring Access to Justice; (3) Prioritizing Family Integrity; (4) Preventing "Crossover" into the Criminal-Legal System; and (5) Promoting Tailored, Child-Centered Court Decisions. I welcome the opportunity to speak with you about any of these topics, and our specific, research-based, proposed solutions for federal reform.

Chief among these goals is the **urgent need to ensure access to legal counsel for children and parents experiencing foster care court proceedings**. From the moment a young person is placed in foster care, everything is at stake – their home, school, family relationships, and basic civil rights. Unfortunately, in many places, children and parents are still forced to navigate the complex legal system without even basic advice or representation from a trained attorney. Our recent report, "[Seen, Heard, and Represented](#)," further explains the nuances of this issue (please let me know if your office would like a hard copy).

Backed by a [strong body of research](#), [newly available funding](#), and [broad national support](#), the time is now for the 118<sup>th</sup> Congress to guarantee counsel for kids and parents. **I would greatly appreciate the opportunity to brief you further on this issue and share possible legislative solutions**. Please let me know if you might be available for a meeting, or if there is further information I can provide. Thank you for your dedication to children and families in your jurisdiction and nationwide.

Sincerely,

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