The Honorable Jason Smith
Chairman
Committee on Ways & Means
U.S. House of Representatives

The Honorable Darin LaHood
Chairman
Work & Welfare Subcommittee
U.S. House of Representatives

The Honorable Richard Neal
Ranking Member
Committee on Ways & Means
U.S. House of Representatives

The Honorable Danny K. Davis
Ranking Member
Work & Welfare Subcommittee
U.S. House of Representatives

November 9, 2026

Re: Support for HR 8997, The Right to Representation Act

Dear Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Neal, Chairman LaHood, and Ranking Member Davis:

The undersigned organizations, representing a wide range of constituents and stakeholders for children and families throughout the country, write to share our strong support for H.R. 8997, The Right to Representation Act, which would guarantee access to legal counsel for children in foster care and their parents. **We urge the Committee to schedule a hearing on this bill and vote in its favor as soon as possible.**

Over decades, Congress has successfully passed important child welfare laws with bipartisan support. However, without a lawyer who is knowledgeable in this area, these mandates ring hollow for approximately 55,000 children in foster care who reside in one of 13 remaining states that do not universally guarantee legal counsel. Likewise, even though parents have a fundamental constitutional right to raise their children, there are still jurisdictions that do not guarantee legal counsel to parents who are facing this system.

Foster care courts are civil rights courts. For too long, child welfare has been viewed solely as a social service arena, when in fact it is a multidisciplinary practice in which the law and the courts are bedrock components. No child is ready to learn and analyze federal statutes. No parent should have to argue the nuances of Supreme Court case law on their own. Children in foster care and their parents need high-quality attorneys to provide legal advice, interview witnesses, file motions, present evidence, and pursue appeals. Lawyers also catch procedural mistakes and expedite a system that often moves at the pace of its slowest bureaucratic agency.

Research has consistently shown that legal counsel reduces delays, enhances parties' participation in the case plan, informs better judicial decision-making, increases family reunification, and helps children reach permanency sooner and with more stable long-term outcomes. For example, a 2021 study from Washington State found that children in foster care with legal representation were 45% more likely to reunify, 30% less likely to change placements, and 65% less likely to experience unnecessary school moves. These results saved state dollars – a total of $1.2 million

for the cohort studied. Research on legal representation for parents yields similarly impressive results.

These savings play out at the federal level as well. A more recent independent fiscal impact assessment projects savings between $81.1-$164.8 million under Title IV-E alone - a conservative estimate that does not reflect savings in other programs like Temporary Assistance to Needy Families, Social Services Block Grants, and federal Medicaid dollars.

Federal funding is already in place to support this work. In 2019, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services opened federal funding for children's and parent's attorneys, which was later codified into regulation. States are readily utilizing these funds. Other federal funding streams also support child welfare legal representation, such as, State Opioid Response Grants, the Victims of Crime Act, and more. It is time for the federal law to catch up with federal financing.

Doing the right thing for families doesn't necessarily mean spending more money; sometimes it means investing wisely up front to save money in the long run. This is one of those times. Our organizations represent a diverse array of child welfare stakeholders from across the country and the political spectrum. We are united in our stance that access to legal representation for children in foster care and their parents is long overdue, and that Congress must remedy this before the 119th Congress is over. We ask that you:

- **Schedule HR 8997 for hearing before the House Ways and Means Committee;**
- **Vote HR 8997 unanimously out of Committee;**
- **Champion HR 8997 by collaborating with the Senate Finance Committee to file mirroring legislation and ensuring the bill's full passage during the 119th Congress.**

Respectfully,

The 208 signatory organizations and law offices listed below

National Organizations

Academic Pediatric Association
American Academy of Pediatrics
Appleseed Foundation
Association of Children's Residential & Community Services (ACRC)
Association of Professionals Solving the Abuse of Children (APSAC)
Center for Safe and Stable Futures
Center for the Rights of Abused Children
Center for the Study of Social Policy
Children and Family Law Center, Washburn University School of Law
Children's Advocacy Institute

Children's Rights
Children's Trust Fund Alliance
Coalition on Human Needs
Doing Good Works
Everest Peak Strategy, LLC
Families Rising
Family Justice Group
Family Justice Resource Center
First Focus Campaign for Children
First Star Institute
Foster America
Foster Care Alumni of America
Foster Greatness
Futures Without Violence
If/When/How: Lawyering for Reproductive
Justice Injustice Reform Network
Justice + Joy National Collaborative
Juvenile Law Center
Kids in Need of Defense
MDDTSpeaks Holding's Inc.
MJCF: Coalition
National American Indian Court Judges Association
National Association for Public Defense
National Association of Counsel for Children
National Center for Youth Law
National Center on Adoption and Permanency
National Coalition for Child and Family Well-
Being National District Attorneys Association
National Family Violence Law Center
National Foster Youth Institute
National Indian Child Welfare Association
National Legal Aid & Defender Association
National Network for Youth
Proximate Solution Inc.
Public Justice Center
Public Knowledge
Ray Helfer Society
SchoolHouse Connection
Social Current
Sunlight
The Steve Nash Foundation
True North Child Advocates, hosts of The Children’s Law

Podcast United Family Advocates
Voice for Adoption
With Lived Experience
Young Center for Immigrant Children's Rights
Youth Law Center
Youth Villages

State and Local Organizations & Law Offices

ABC Law Group (Washington)
Advance Maryland (Maryland)
Advocates for Children Club at The Ohio State University Moritz College of Law (Ohio)
Advokids (California)
Alliance for Children's Rights (California)
Ampersand Families (Minnesota)
Amy J. Genet, P.A. (Florida)
Ashtari Law Firm, PLLC (Texas)
AspireMN (Minnesota)
Barbier Law Offices PLC (Michigan)
Be the Source (Colorado)
Belknap Legal Services (New Hampshire)
Berton Law, PLLC (Washington)
Bridges (Texas)
Busha Law Offices (Washington)
California Alliance of Caregivers (California)
Casakids (New Mexico)
Center for Children & Youth Justice (Washington)
Center for Elder Law and Justice (New York)
Center for Family Advocacy, Virginia Poverty Law Center (Virginia)
Charleston Legal Access (South Carolina)
Chatham County Child Advocate Office (Georgia)
Chicago Appleseed (Illinois)
Child Advocacy Team (CAT) (Michigan)
Child Advocates, Inc. (Indiana)
Child's Voice Law (North Carolina)
Children in Placement - CT, Inc. (Connecticut)
Children's Action Alliance (Arizona)
Children's Alliance of Kansas (Kansas)
Children's Best Interest Project (Illinois)
Children's Defense Fund - New York (New York)
Children's Law Center DC (District of Columbia)
Children's Law Center of California (California)

Children's Law Center of Massachusetts (Massachusetts)
Children's Law Center of New Hampshire (New Hampshire)
Children's Legal Services of San Diego (California)
Children's Rights Society (New York)
Children's Trust of Massachusetts (Massachusetts)
Circuit Court Division III, Fourth Judicial District, Arkansas (Arkansas)
Citizens Concerned for Children, Inc. (New York)
Colorado Office of Respondent Parents' Counsel (Colorado)
Community Legal Services of Philadelphia (Pennsylvania)
Crouch Bartlett Law, P.C. (Texas)
Defender Association of Philadelphia (Pennsylvania)
Disability Rights Center - NH Inc (New Hampshire)
East Bay Children's Law Offices (California)
EFyTECH (Michigan)
Elevating Connections (Colorado)
Ellen Babb (South Carolina)
Ennerberg Law (Georgia)
Facing Foster Care in Alaska (Alaska)
Family Alternatives (Minnesota)
Florida's Children First (Florida)
Fort Peck Tribes' Red Bird Woman Center (Montana)
Foster Care Advocacy Center (Texas)
Foster Fairness (Florida)
Foster Kinship (Nevada)
Good Legal Firm, LLC (Georgia)
Grandell LLC (Delaware)
Greatest Matriarchs Society (Washington)
Gwinnett County Child Advocacy & Juvenile Services (Georgia)
HALOS (South Carolina)
Hawaii Children's Action Network Speaks! (Hawaii)
John Burton Advocates for Youth (California)
Justice for Kids (Florida)
Keeping Families Connected Minnesota (Minnesota)
Kentucky Youth Law Project, Inc. (Kentucky)
Kilgore Law, PLLC (Maine)
Kris-Ann Poe, P.C. (Georgia)
Kubat Law LLC Children's Representation (Washington)
Law Office of Ernest Anemone LLC (New Jersey)
Lawyers Committee for Children's Rights (South Carolina)
Lawyers For Children (New York)
LEADWithLived (Michigan)
Legal Aid Center of Southern Nevada (Nevada)

Legal Aid Justice Center (Virginia)
Legal Aid Society of Palm Beach County (Florida)
Legal Counsel for Youth and Children (Washington)
Lien & Bond Investigations (Arizona)
Los Angeles Dependency Lawyers, Inc. (California)
Melissa Munoz PC (Texas)
Midwest Supervised Visitation (Minnesota)
Minnesota Office of the Foster Youth Ombudsperson (Minnesota)
Mississippi Office of State Public Defender (Mississippi)
Missouri Appleseed (Missouri)
Missouri Coalition for Children (Missouri)
Morgan Law Firm (Alabama)
Morley Legal Services, Ltd. (North Dakota)
Mothers Outreach Network (District of Columbia)
Murray Law Group, LLC (Florida)
Nebraska Appleseed (Nebraska)
Nesta Rose Consulting, PLLC (Pennsylvania)
New Futures (New Hampshire)
Northeast Ohio Community Resilience Centre (Ohio)
NYC Family Policy Project (New York)
Office of the Child Representative (Colorado)
Office of the Cook County Public Guardian (Illinois)
Ohio Federation for Health Equity and Social Justice (Ohio)
Ohio Grandparent Kinship Coalition (Ohio)
Oklahoma Children's Court Improvement Program (Oklahoma)
Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy (Oklahoma)
Our Children Oregon (Oregon)
Partners for Our Children (Washington)
Patriarchs of Progression Society (Washington)
Pegasus Legal Services for Children (New Mexico)
Pensacola Youth Advocacy Project (Florida)
Pima County Office of Children's Counsel (Arizona)
Prevent Child Abuse Arizona (Arizona)
Public Counsel (California)
Public Defender Services (West Virginia)
Racial Equity Collaborative, Inc. (Kansas)
Sayra & Neil Meyerhoff Center for Families, Children & the Courts, Univ. of Baltimore Law (Maryland)
SaySo (Strong Able Youth Speaking Out) (North Carolina)
Sister Warriors Freedom Coalition (California)
The Justice for Children Project at the Moritz College of Law (Ohio)
South Carolina Appleseed Legal Justice Center (South Carolina)
Ssevon Legal, PLLC (Washington)

Support Center for Child Advocates (Pennsylvania)
Tennessee Justice Center (Tennessee)
Texans Care for Children (Texas)
Texas Association of Family Defense Attorneys (Texas)
Texas Lawyers for Children (Texas)
The Arizona Center for Law in the Public Interest (Arizona)
The Bertella Law Firm, P.C. (Alabama)
The Choice Program at UMBC (Maryland)
The Franklin Law Group, P.C. (Maryland)
The Law Office of Lauri J Owen PLLC (Arizona)
The Law Offices of Meghan E. Scott, LLC (Colorado)
The Legal Aid Society (New York)
The Mockingbird Society (Washington)
Travis County Child Representation (Texas)
Tulalip Office of Civil Legal Aid (Washington)
Umpqua Valley Public Defender (Oregon)
Urban Justice Center | Domestic Violence Project (New York)
Utah Indigent Defense Commission (Utah)
Valentine & Olofson, PLLC (Idaho)
Vermont Office of the Child, Youth, and Family Advocate (Vermont)
Voices for Vermont's Children (Vermont)
Voices for Virginia's Children (Virginia)
WA Association for Children and Families (Washington)
Washington Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers (Washington)
Washington Defender Association (Washington)
Washington State Office of Civil Legal Aid (Washington)
Washington State Office of Public Defense (Washington)
Waterloo, IA Juvenile Public Defender's Office (Iowa)
Waypoint (New Hampshire)
Wisconsin Association of Family & Children's Agencies (WAFCA) (Wisconsin)
Wyoming Office of Guardian ad litem (Wyoming)
Youth Heartline (New Mexico)
Youth, Rights & Justice (Oregon)