



*Statement by Shay Bilchik, President/CEO, Child Welfare League of America
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Since 1920, The Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) has been the nation's pre-eminent membership-based organization dedicated to ensuring that disadvantaged and vulnerable children are protected from harm and have the tools and resources they need to grow into the healthy and happy adults we want them to become. CWLA is the trusted authority for professionals who work with children and the only national organization with 900 public and private member agencies providing unique access and influence in all sectors of the children's services field including family preservation, foster care, adoption, and independent living services for youth aging out of foster care.

As advocates and providers for children, youth, and families, we support the provisions in H.R. 1461 that would create an Affordable Housing Fund. We are counting on the many affordable housing units that will be generated through the Fund - resources that are necessary to keep America's most vulnerable families together and safe.

In the absence of an adequate supply of affordable housing, child welfare agencies are too often put in the unenviable position of placing homeless and precariously housed children in foster care. This is a costly practice in terms of the emotional impact on children who are already disadvantaged *and* comes at great expense to taxpayers. Nationally, the average cost of keeping the children of one family in foster care is \$47,608 annually. The average cost of permanent housing and supportive services for that same-sized family would be less than a third of the cost of foster care placement – approximately \$13,412ⁱ. At least 30% of children in foster care could return home sooner if their parents had access to housing.ⁱⁱ If affordable housing were available to those families, federal, state, and local governments could **save** \$1.94 billion annuallyⁱⁱⁱ.

Additionally, youth aging out of the child welfare system are confronted with the harsh reality of the gap between the wages they are qualified to earn and the cost of housing. As a result, 25-41% of these young people experience homelessness.^{iv}

Unfortunately, a compromise made in order to bring H.R. 1461 to a floor vote would prohibit CWLA members who use money from the Fund from registering young people to vote when they turn 18. This is in direct conflict with our commitment to educate young people aging out of the foster care system about their rights and responsibilities as successful adults. The proposed amendment also restricts agencies from lobbying on behalf of vulnerable youth or maintaining affiliations with agencies who engage in this type of advocacy. So, while child welfare agencies desperately need access to new housing resources to combat youth homelessness and family separation, we cannot in good conscience support the bill with this amendment included.

We urge Members of the House to maintain the Affordable Housing Fund in H.R. 1461 but oppose this amendment that will compromise our members' ability to educate young people who reach adulthood in the foster care system about their right to participate fully in civic life and their responsibility to be contributing, productive members of American society.

ⁱ Harburger, D.S. with White, R.A. (2004). Reunifying families cutting costs. Housing-child welfare partnerships for permanent supportive housing. *Housing and homelessness: A special issue. Child Welfare, 83(5)*, 389-392.

ⁱⁱ Doerre, Y.A., & Mihaly, L.K. (1996). Home sweet home. Washington, DC: CWLA

ⁱⁱⁱ Harburger, D.S. with White, R.A. (2004). Reunifying families cutting costs. Housing-child welfare partnerships for permanent supportive housing. *Housing and homelessness: A special issue. Child Welfare, 83(5)*, 389-392.

^{iv} Courtney, M. E. & Piliavin, I. (1998) Foster youth transitions to adulthood: Outcomes 12-18 months after leaving out of home care. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin, School of Social Work and Institute for Research on Poverty. ...