

# Advocating for Adoption Assistance

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# Welcome!

We're excited for today's training session on advocating for adoption assistance.





# About Families Rising

Our mission is to amplify those with lived experience, assist adoptive, foster, and kinship parents, educate child welfare professionals, and champion the well-being of children and families.

Learn more at  
**[wearefamiliesrising.org](https://wearefamiliesrising.org)**



## At Families Rising, we:

- ***SUPPORT*** adoptive, foster, and kinship parents and young people
- ***EDUCATE*** child welfare professionals
- ***ADVOCATE*** that children and families have support

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# Today's Agenda



**Legislative Engagement**



**Talking Points and Telling Stories**



**Research**



# Today's Agenda



**Other Advocacy Tools**



**Specific Advocacy Ideas**



**Two State Examples**



# Misperceptions

- Parents are in it for the money
- We don't pay parents to raise their own (birth) children



# Legislative Engagement





# Legislative Engagement

- State and provincial legislatures holds the purse strings
- Many things are set in statute – laws passed by the legislature.
- Including definition of special needs in some states/provinces
- Except for Nebraska, every state legislature has two chambers.
- It is good to find out who are the members of the committees that deal with human service issues.
- For parliaments, which legislator is the Minister over the department.

# Understanding the Legislature

- Most states pass two year budget cycles during odd number year legislative sessions.
- When is the legislature in session? National Conference on State Legislators has this guide:
  - <https://www.ncsl.org/about-state-legislatures/2024-state-legislative-session-calendar>
  - Check to see if key committees have e-mail lists you can be a part of.
- Provincial calendars seem to be spring and fall.
- NOTE: At the end of session, because of time and arcane process rules, things might get rolled into a huge bill, often these are called omnibus bills.

# Connecting with Legislators

- First you need to know who is your representative, senator, assemblyperson, MPP or MLA.
- Are there any personal details you know about your legislator?
- Have they been a foster or adoptive parent?
- Do they have family or personal connections to foster care or adoption?

# Connecting with Legislators

- You may not find a solution this legislative session, especially if your advocacy efforts have a cost.
  - Make the case of cost savings.
- Another issue with costs, is that as we have more children moving to adoption, the cost of adoption assistance programs have gone up. Will legislatures try to limit future costs, or cut existing agreements.
- It is always good to connect with your legislator and let them know what your interests are.
- Many times these efforts will take multiple years.
- Do not wait until your state/province has a surplus to begin laying the ground work.

# Connecting with Legislators



- If you have not already met or talked with your legislator, then here are some ways to connect with them now.
  - Get a group of parents together in your district and invite your legislator for an open house.
  - Find out when they have meetings with constituents in your district and attend it.
  - Call them, calling is better than letter or e-mail. Be prepared to give your address so they know you are a constituent of theirs (boss/voter).

# Connecting with Legislators



- If a group that advocates for child welfare issues is doing a day at the legislature, go to the rally and schedule meetings (in advance) with your legislator. This will connect you with your legislator and raise awareness.
- If your county has an adoption day, invite them to it. Let them see how important it is that wards of the state/province are getting forever families.
- Be creative, these are some ideas, but ultimately you are their boss, they should be responsive to your issues.



# Things to remember about working with legislators

- As a constituent you are their boss.
- In theory the legislator is working to keep your vote or earn your vote for the next election.
- With the way districts are drawn by both parties (US), there are many safe districts and you may have a less responsive legislator.
- If you don't like all their policies, keep that under wraps. You want their help, so don't antagonize them.
- Adoption tends to be bi-partisan/multi-partisan, something all parties can agree on.

# Working with administrators

- When advocating be respectful
- Do not burn bridges.
- State staff can be crucial allies.
- They may want the same outcome but can't advocate for it.
- They may be able to provide you with data to help make your case.
- If legislation gets passed, they will be involved with administering it.
- There may be changes to rules/administrative code/policy that doesn't require the legislature. State agencies may have e-mail lists about rules changes and the ability for public comment (often in writing).

# Talking Points and Telling Stories



# Talking Points



- Families face special challenges raising adopted children with special needs
- Currently, 113,000 foster children in the United States are waiting for an adoptive family. Adoption assistance (also known as adoption subsidy) is a critically important tool to encourage the adoption of these children and youth who have special needs.
- Many foster children waiting for adoption—and the children already adopted from foster care—have special physical, mental health, and developmental needs. Studies show that these children are at heightened risk of moderate to severe health problems, learning disabilities, developmental delays, physical impairments, and mental health difficulties.



## Talking Points

In one survey, adoptive families reported that:

58 percent of their children needed specialized health care,

68 percent had an educational delay,

69 percent exhibited misconduct, and

83 percent exhibited some other kind of serious behavioral problem.

# Talking Points

- Children adopted from foster care face many more challenges than healthy birth children. And parenting children who have endured abuse, neglect, or other traumas—especially those who suffer from mental health problems or never learned to attach to a family—can be very difficult. It is only logical that governments would offer equitable, case-specific assistance to all families who care for children brought into government custody, yet adoptive families often receive significantly less financial aid and fewer services than foster parents.







# Talking Points

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## Talking Points

Adoption has important benefits for children and youth

Adoptive families provide love and emotional security for their children, the stability of a committed family who will be there for them throughout childhood and into adulthood, a place to call home, and financial support. Like other parents who provide, on average, \$38,000 in assistance to their children between ages 18 and 34, adoptive parents continue to provide support for their children as they transition into adulthood—support that is not likely to be available for youth who do not leave foster care for permanent families.



# Talking Points

- Research has demonstrated that youth who are adopted, when compared to youth in foster care, are:
  - more likely to complete high school or the equivalent,
  - more likely to attend and complete college,
  - less likely to become teen parents,
  - less likely to abuse drugs and alcohol,
  - less likely to have mental health problems,
  - less likely to be arrested or incarcerated,
  - more likely to be employed, and
  - more likely to have adequate incomes (with one study showing that individuals adopted from foster care have incomes that are 75 percent higher than young adults who age out of foster care).



# Telling Personal Stories

A key component of any advocacy strategy is finding personal stories that demonstrate the importance of the change you seek. Personal stories:

- lend credibility to a problem or solution
- put a human face on a problem or solution
- help others identify with a problem or solution
- engage a reader's heart, stir compassion
- move people to action to solve the problem or contribute to a solution



# Telling Personal Stories

In adoption assistance advocacy, the stories should demonstrate how the monthly benefit or medical insurance made a difference to the child or youth. For example, if the family couldn't have adopted without adoption assistance, the story might explore how adoption has changed the youth's behaviors and is leading toward a brighter future. Or, the story might discuss how the family used the adoption assistance to help the child function better in school, at home, or in the community. Be careful not to focus on the money itself or to talk about things that might be considered luxuries.

# Ontario Youth Speak Out

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZL8lydj947Q>





# Other Advocacy Tools





# Other Advocacy Tools

A lot of advocacy comes from long term raising awareness, here are some other ideas

- Get media to highlight the good stories, like National Adoption Day.
- Foster doll project
- Use social media
- Create a visual display to represent children in the child welfare system



# Alabama Shoe Project

6,029 pairs of shoes were placed on the capital steps – each pair representing a child in Foster Care in Alabama.

The message of the rally was clear: Put Foster Children first. Kids to Love Founder Lee Marshall shared the starting statistic “Lawmakers in Alabama make \$134.25 a day, it cost \$35.98 to house a prisoner in Alabama a day. Foster children in our state receive between \$8 to \$14 a day.

# Alabama Shoe Project



**Research**







# Research

Three great places to look for research are NACAC's publications:

- The Value of Adoption Subsidies
- Adoption Assistance Advocacy Toolkit
- The Vital Role of Adoption Subsidies
- All available at,  
<https://wearefamiliesrising.org/advocating-for-adoption-assistance/>



# Research



- “A Comparison of the Governmental Costs of Long-Term Foster Care and Adoption,” in Social Service Review, by Richard P. Barth, Chung Kwon Lee, Judith Wildfire, & Shenyang Guo, March 2006.
- “The Economics of Adoption of Children from Foster Care,” American University Department of Economics Working Paper, by Mary Eschelbach Hansen and Bradley A. Hansen, September 2005.
- “The Economics of Adoption of Children from Foster Care,” Child Welfare Vol. LXXXV, #3, by Mary Eschelbach Hansen and Bradley A. Hansen, May/June 2006.
- Ending the Foster Care Life Sentence: The Critical Need for Adoption Subsidies—A Survey of Adoptive and Pre-Adoptive Parents, by Children’s Rights, July 2006.
- “Title IV-E Claims and Adoption Assistance Payments,” AFCARS Adoption Data Research Brief Number 5, by Mary Eschelbach Hansen, June 2006.
- “Understanding Adoption Subsidies: An Analysis of AFCARS Data,” by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, January 2005
- “The Value of Adoption,” American University Department of Economics Working Paper, by Mary Eschelbach Hansen, December 2006.

## Specific Ideas for Advocacy





# Subsidy Rates

- Subsidy rates up to maximum foster care rate.
- A state CAN but is not required to have a subsidy rate up to the maximum foster care rate.
- A state is allowed to have a lower ceiling, but not required to.
- States can offer the maximum subsidy rate, their negotiation can be an offer of the maximum rate.
- If your state already has equal rates and offers the maximum, but the rates are very low, then advocate for foster care and adoption subsidy rates to increase.

# Subsidy to age 21

- Many states do provide subsidy past the age of 18, but often with conditions.
- State funds – can fund all children
  - Some states fund children still in school – can be high school or college (or both)
- Federal funds
  - If the child has a disability that warrants continuation of adoption subsidy to age 21.
  - Youth adopted at age 16 or older if they meet certain requirements:
    - the youth to be completing secondary school (or equivalent),
    - enrolled in post-secondary or vocational school,
    - participating in a program or activity that promotes or removes barriers to employment,
    - employed 80 hours a month,
    - or to be incapable of any of these due to a documented medical condition



## Other Services

- Adding specific services
  - Is it covered by other programs, such as Medicaid, or a requirement of the schools?
- How much will it cost?
- Who will be eligible for it?
- Do you have to reside in the state that the child came from foster care?





## Canada specific ideas

- Ontario – changing the income test for Targeted Adoption Subsidy so it phases out based on income and family size
- Advocating for federal funding to the provinces.

## Two Examples of State Advocacy







# Washington State

Adoption caseloads have significantly increased as the Department focuses on achieving permanency for children. The state pays adoption support payments to parents who adopted from the state foster care system. The number of children in foster care began decreasing consistently in 2009 (but have started to rise again in the past few years).



# Washington State

- At first because of budgetary reasons, Washington capped negotiations at 80% of foster care rates.
- The state legislature then put into law the 80% cap for a few years.
  - This was unanimous vote in both chambers.
- Currently the state law is to cap the rate 80-95% based on age at time of adoption.





# Indiana

- In 2009 the state of Indiana consolidated adoption under a Central Eligibility Unit (CEU) from the very county run system that had been in place.
- It seems not enough state dollars were allocated to this new program so that the state created wait lists for children who met the state definition of special needs, but not Title IV-E eligibility.
- In 2014 a grandmother who had adopted her grandchildren with just a Medicaid card, but no monthly payment sought a class action lawsuit. Families Rising provided an affidavit in support the lawsuit.
- The settlement only funded the non IV-E program for a year, but the next legislative session they funded the program permanently.



# Indiana

- Without an increase in state funding, the negotiation would get more challenging for IV-E and non IV-E adoption assistance agreements.
- Parent advocates worked for years to advocate that minimum negotiation that the state offers was 50%.
  - That took effect in two parts, for higher needs children, and then later for all children.
- While Indiana has always had one of the lowest ages to qualify as special needs, age 2 years old or older, they currently have specific legislation that would put into law that all children adopted from foster care are consider eligible for adoption subsidy!

# US Statistics

## AFCARS

- Special needs years 2012-2016
  - [https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/cb/special\\_needs2012\\_2016.pdf](https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/cb/special_needs2012_2016.pdf)
- Adoption Assistance years 2012-2016
  - [https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/cb/adoption\\_subsidy2012\\_2016.pdf](https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/cb/adoption_subsidy2012_2016.pdf)
- Age at finalization 2016
  - [https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/cb/final\\_age2016.pdf](https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/cb/final_age2016.pdf)
- Child Welfare Outcomes 2010-2014 (last multi year comparison)
  - <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/data-research/child-welfare-outcomes>
  - 2010-2014 (last multi year comparison)

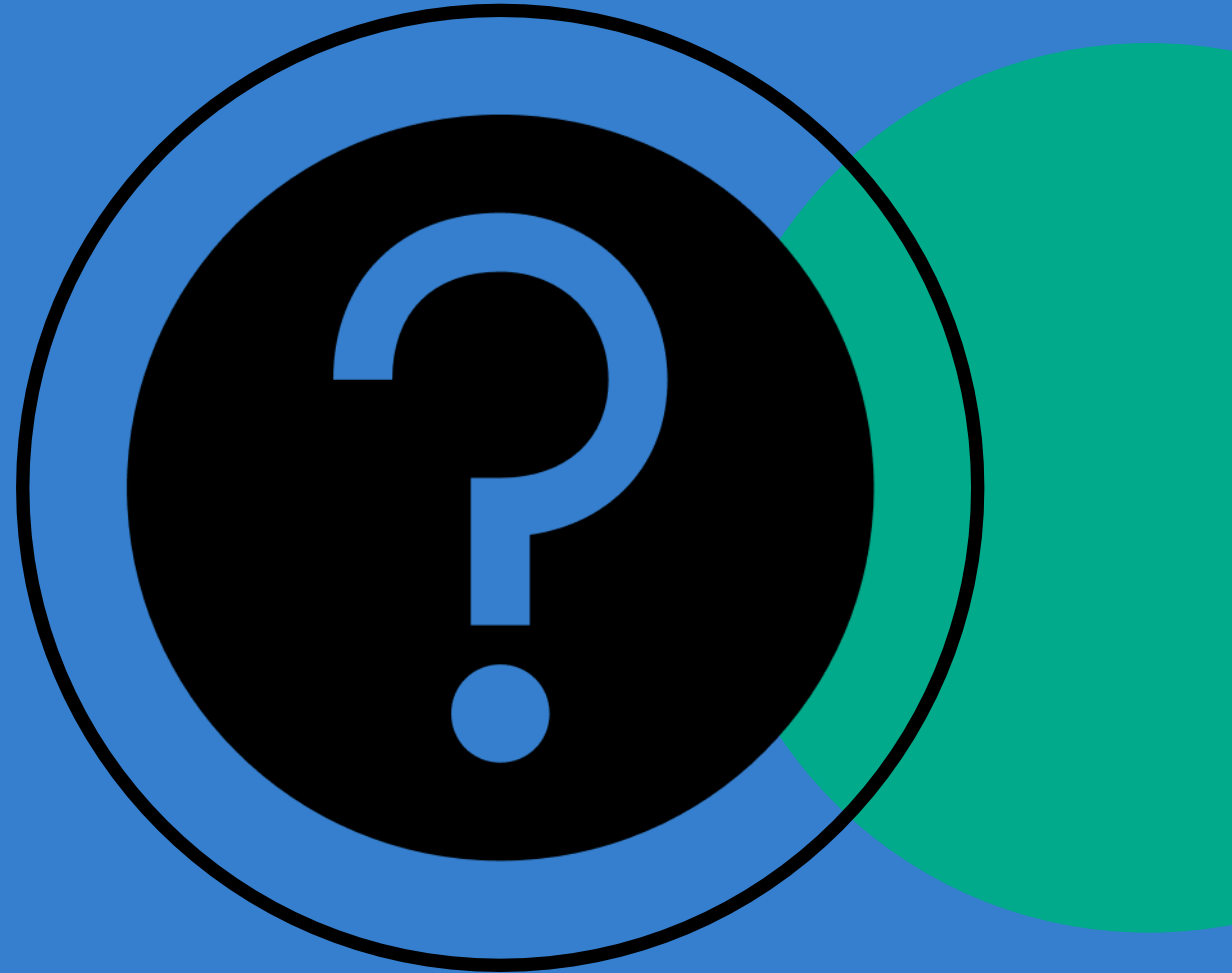
# Any final questions?

More info at [wearefamiliesrising.org](http://wearefamiliesrising.org)

651-644-3036 x115

OR 1-800-470-6665 x115

[joshk@wearefamiliesrising.org](mailto:joshk@wearefamiliesrising.org)



# Today's Presenter



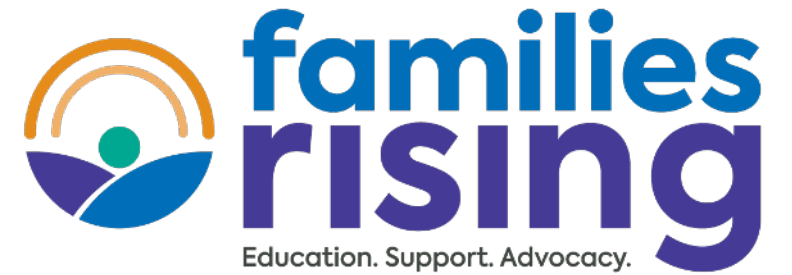
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# Thank you!

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