



Federal Policy Tool

# ECONOMIC & CONCRETE SUPPORTS IN STATEMENTS AND TESTIMONY FROM MAY 2024 FAMILY FIRST HEARING

This tool summarizes statements and testimony from a May 2024 U.S. Senate hearing on the Family First Prevention Services Act related economic and concrete supports (ECS). It compiles ECS content from opening statements, testimonies of hearing witnesses, and written testimonies submitted by a variety of organizations. These statements and testimonies reflect increasing recognition of the need for ECS as a mechanism of prevention and call for the inclusion of ECS in Family First.

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# Economic & Concrete Supports in Statements and Testimonies from the May 2024 Family First Hearing

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## OVERVIEW

The U.S. Senate Committee on Finance held a full committee hearing on May 22, 2024 entitled *The Family First Prevention Services Act: Successes, Roadblocks and Opportunities for Improvement*.

The Family First Prevention Services Act has the potential to prevent child abuse and neglect by addressing root causes, support families with the services and supports they indicate are most helpful, change the life-course of millions of children, and strengthen our nation for generations to come. Family First is a transformational prevention policy and responsive to years of advocacy for federal funding for prevention services, yet there is language in the policy related to eligibility and risk that has negatively altered the trajectory of implementation and the number of families who have benefited as described in testimony from witnesses and organizations submitting statements. Additionally, testimony and submitted statements provided for the May 22, 2024, hearing identify a key gap in the policy regarding the provision of economic and concrete supports (ECS), which are related to child abuse and neglect and family involvement in child welfare. This document primarily relates to content from testimonies and statements regarding ECS, which need be understood in the context of eligibility and risk definitions outlined in the legislation.

Revisions or clarifications to both risk definitions and eligibility for Family First services could facilitate the prevention intent of Family First, increase implementation, and promote family connections to programs and services, including service uptake and completion. The use of terms "*candidate for foster care*," "*imminent risk of foster care entry*," and "*if not for this service the plan for the child is foster care*" with families is not aligned with the evidence and intent of prevention, as well as the experience and lessons learned from states and families over the past six years of implementation. These terms anchor child welfare prevention in a coercion framework when new evidence and innovation point toward proactively engaging and supporting families upstream. Traditional candidacy for foster care remains available as a child protection tool, when necessary, but candidacy has limited and counterproductive utility in this new prevention space. ***This misalignment is holding back implementation, creates unnecessary administrative burden, and lacks coherence with authentically engaging families in prevention services that are voluntary and meet their needs. Reorienting eligibility for Family First services to effectively prevent child abuse and neglect, which occurs long before a child is at imminent risk of foster care entry or a candidate for foster care, would better support the legislative intent of putting families first and providing prevention services.***

# ACCESS TO ECONOMIC AND CONCRETE SUPPORTS AS A CHILD WELFARE PREVENTION STRATEGY

Since initial passage in 2018, much has been learned in research and on-the-ground implementation of the policy about the relationship between family financial stability, child abuse and neglect, and involvement with child welfare, including placement into foster care. There is increasing recognition, as evidenced in hearing testimonies and statements, of the need for ECS as a mechanism of prevention. It is also in the context of voluntary services and supports designed to prevent child abuse and neglect from occurring and improving child well-being outcomes that the witness' testimonies and submitted statements call for the inclusion of ECS in Family First.

This document provides an overview of content related to ECS from three hearing sources, including:

- 1) opening statements of Senator Wyden and Senator Crapo;
- 2) testimonies of hearing witnesses, including Rebecca Jones Gaston, Commissioner, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; JooYeun Chang of the Doris Duke Foundation; David Reed, the Deputy Director of Child Welfare Services for the State of Indiana, and Laurie Tapozada, a Kinship Grandma; and
- 3) written testimonies submitted by a variety of organizations, including the American Public Human Services Association, the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the National Child Abuse Coalition, the American Bar Association, Social Current, the Children's Trust Fund Alliance, Generations United, and Chapin Hall.

For each, we summarize the ECS-related content and provide quotes that illustrate this content.

**Senator Wyden** indicates that meeting families' basic needs may prevent the need for foster care.

- "Sometimes, in order to prevent the need for foster care, mom and dad might need a little help. Maybe a parent needs mental health care or substance use disorder treatment, or parenting training and support, or maybe the family needs to do family therapy. Or **maybe parents just need help meeting the family's basic needs.** So under Family First, we created new federal funding for those services." [Senator Wyden Opening Statement](#)

**"Sometimes, in order to prevent the need for foster care, mom and dad might need a little help."**

**- Senator Wyden**

**Senator Crapo** indicates the need for a comprehensive continuum of care.

- "However, despite bipartisan efforts in Congress to increase the number of evidence-based models certified by the Clearinghouse, states continue to have limited options in certain categories, and rural areas struggle to implement one-size-fits-all models in their communities. The Chairman and I have encouraged the Administration to expedite the Clearinghouse review process so that states have a variety of community-based services to offer as part of a **comprehensive continuum of care.**" [Senator Crapo Opening Statement](#)

**Commissioner Rebecca Jones Gaston** acknowledges the role of ECS in preventing child welfare involvement and identifies child care and other concrete supports as prevention strategies.

- "I hear routinely from youth and families from across the country that have experienced the child welfare system that many of their families could have stayed safely together if support for their family's housing, child care, mental health, substance use services, and/or other concrete needs had been met."
- "ACF is also focused on strengthening other systems that can meet the needs of children and families, recognizing that **the child welfare system alone cannot support family well-being.**"
- "Addressing the child care needs of families is also a strategy to prevent unnecessary child welfare involvement."
- "Further, the proposal in the President's FY 2025 budget to restore the full Child Tax Credit expansion enacted in the American Rescue Plan, which helped cut child poverty nearly in half in 2021 to its lowest level in history, would make significant strides in meeting the concrete needs of families. Research has shown policy changes like this reduce child welfare involvement."

- “Data demonstrates that many relatives who care for their family members are more likely to experience poverty and have higher needs for services and supports—circumstances in which financial support can make all the difference.”

**JooYeun Chang**, Doris Duke Foundation, describes a need for expansion of eligible prevention services to include material and concrete support for families.

- “In a recent national survey conducted by the American Public Human Services Association and Chapin Hall Center for Children, 64.1 percent of responding states reported that ‘inability to meet economic need is often a contributing reason for family involvement in child welfare.’ 100 percent reported that the inability to meet economic needs is at least ‘sometimes’ a contributing reason.”
- “Although economic need is a significant factor in family risk of abuse and neglect and entry to foster care, the current child welfare policy framework orients assessment and intervention predominantly at parenting behaviors and capacities (e.g., substance use and mental health) thereby leaving unaddressed this key driver of child welfare involvement.”
- “An ever-growing body of evidence clarifies that when ECS are provided—via macroeconomic and universal policies (e.g., earned income tax credit, child tax credit, paid family leave) and human service sector strategies (e.g., childcare, cash assistance, health care, housing) —child maltreatment and involvement with child protection are reduced.” “Providing a framework for the use of material [supports] through Family First can help ensure that poverty is not the primary reason a child is entering foster care.”
- “An alternative system response that can meet the comprehensive needs of families at risk must be able to attend to not only a family’s service needs through effective engagement strategies and care coordination but must also address the time-sensitive material needs that contribute to maltreatment and foster care placement risk.”

**David Reed**, the Deputy Director of Child Welfare Services for the State of Indiana, recognizes the role of ECS in supporting child safety, discusses the provision of ECS in Indiana, and describes areas where Family First can be improved to help realize the goals of this research-informed legislation”.

- “Much research exists about how families who have access to ECS when they need them have safer children. It is a well-researched and clearly identified protective factor.”

- “When the financial costs of foster care are considered, let alone the emotional, developmental, social, and mental health costs, the value of providing concrete support to prevent removal, assuming it is safe to do so, is hard to overstate.”
- “It is clear that economic and concrete support when available to families helps to keep kids safe, and Family First should be amended to allow for more access to them for families whose children are at risk of foster-care entry.”
- “The [Indiana Family Preservation Service] INFPS model requires that concrete support be provided to families when not doing so would result in children having to come into foster care. That is the plain language in our manual, and it is clear those supports have been some of the most valuable interventions we have provided since we launched the service--statewide—on June 1, 2020.”
- “The Prevention Services Clearinghouse should give special consideration to models that include access to concrete support and should consider adding a separate category altogether to the four existing service areas for concrete-support-alone models. These models could then be available to pair with other models from the Mental Health, Substance Abuse, In-Home Parent Skill-Based, and Kinship Navigator categories to increase their impact.”

“When the financial costs of foster care are considered, let alone the emotional, developmental, social, and mental health costs, the value of providing concrete support to prevent removal, assuming it is safe to do so, is hard to overstate.”

- David Reed

**Laurie Tapozada**, Kinship Grandmother, recommends dedicated funding to support kinship caregivers in meeting their needs for housing, child care, and other concrete and material needs.

- “The needs for these (kinship) families are significant from financial, to legal, to mental health services, to help their children in school get the services they need, to a growing and heart-breaking problem-housing!!!”
- “Working frantically with a grandmother in her seventies raising her two grandchildren, trying to keep them out of her car as a home is a horrible and haunting experience...**We need stable, affordable housing for our kinship families!!**”
- “Develop dedicated funding to assist with housing for kinship families.”
- “In the US we have more than 2.4 million kids being raised by kin. **Supporting these (kin) families is preventative work, helping to keep kids out of foster care.** ...Are you aware that kinship

caregivers save this country approximately four billion dollars each year by preventing kids from having to enter foster care?”

- “We need a flexible budget for these material needs. Federal policy should make explicit that kinship navigator funds can be used to help families with concrete needs.”
- “Have a budget item for providing for necessary concrete goods and material needs that is not predefined in order to give the families what they need without requiring the children to come into foster care!”

**The American Public Human Services Association** acknowledges the need for a comprehensive prevention and well-being system, including multi-system accountability, that reflects the range of economic, social, behavioral, mental, and physical supports that may be needed to help family stability; recognizes that the current scope of Family First does not address the link between poverty and child welfare involvement, and recommends including ECS as a new category of eligible IV-E prevention services to support families.

- “In a 2023 survey of child welfare administrators, there was agreement that child care, money, housing, transportation, food, and employment needs are frequently present in suspected maltreatment reports .... **a comprehensive prevention approach should reflect the range of economic, social, behavioral, mental, and physical supports that may be needed to help family stability. Yet despite the obvious need, Family First glaringly omits the provision of ECS in the design of a comprehensive and effective prevention strategy.** Our inability to alleviate the pressures of financial instability as a frequent contributor to the risk of child welfare involvement leaves a glaring hole in our FFPSA prevention model.”
- “A multi-system accountability approach is essential to get ahead of this emergency response for children and families; one that involves coordination and shared responsibility across various systems that interact with children and families, including child care, child support, education, children’s behavioral health, health care, economic services, and juvenile justice. While Family First seeks to embed a prevention lens into the child welfare system, a broader cross-sector prevention framework is needed that captures the multiple system touchpoints families experience.”
- “Inclusion of “ECS” as a category of service would help child welfare agencies support eligible families when the material hardships they face are a contributing factor to family separation.”

**The Annie E. Casey Foundation** describes the need to broaden the Title IV-E prevention service array to include ECS as an allowable service category, allow the use of flexible funding to prevent unnecessary entries to foster care, and prioritize Clearinghouse interventions that provide ECS support. In addition, the Annie E Casey Foundation elevated the importance of meeting the concrete needs of

kinship caregivers and recommends making youth in foster care categorially eligible for prevention services.

- “Broaden the Title IV-E prevention service array to stabilize more families through flexible funding and expedited access to ECS to prevent unnecessary entries to foster care... In states like Indiana, Kentucky and Wisconsin, the use of flexible funding to provide concrete support has shown promising results in preventing subsequent child welfare involvement.”
- “We recommend including ECS services and access and engagement services as allowable service categories. Once the service categories are broadened, we recommend the Family First Clearinghouse **prioritize interventions that provide concrete and economic support in their reviews to facilitate quick implementation.**”
- “Ensure that every kinship caregiver who is caring for a child or youth in child welfare custody is fully supported and has access to an array of services and support, including but not limited to kinship navigation, peer support and financial assistance. ... agencies increasingly rely on kin to reduce use of group care, so the kin must be provided with the services and support they need.”
- “Make young people in foster care categorially eligible for prevention services, in alignment with Chafee eligibility. Current eligibility for expectant and parenting youth in foster care is missing the opportunity to ensure all young people in foster care have the services and supports they need to avoid child welfare systems as they transition to adulthood.”
- “Nearly 20,000 young people age out annually. These youth face a steep climb on the road to adulthood, including setbacks in education, higher rates of mental health needs, higher risk of homelessness and other hardship. We can and must do better to help each of these young people have the relationships, support and opportunities to succeed. Enabling them to receive prevention services under the Family First Act can better position states to help them achieve success.”

**The National Child Abuse Coalition** recognizes the existing limitations in Family First of not addressing economic-related risk factors for child welfare involvement, describes benefits of including of ECS and peer support navigation services as allowable evidence-based programs and services, and acknowledges the need for Title IV-B funding for the provision of concrete and economic support to families who have reunified or will be reunified.

- “Six years after the passage of law, Family First still holds tremendous promise for preventing unnecessary foster care placements, particularly for children and families experiencing poverty, which research shows is a critical risk factor for child welfare system involvement.”
- “Add domestic violence, ECS, and peer support navigation to allowable categories of evidence-based programs and services under Title IV-E Prevention Services.”

- “Research has made clear the connections between economic hardship and child welfare system involvement. ...even modest financial supports can reduce involvement with child protective services. In Indiana, for example, concrete support offered alongside prevention services approved by the Clearinghouse have reduced foster care caseloads by half since 2019, with the greatest impact on families of color.”
- “The original Family Stability and Kinship Care Act proposal, much of which was incorporated into Family First, included this service category, given the strong evidence for it even in 2016. We recommend that Congress explicitly name concrete and economic support as an allowable category of programs and services to be reviewed by the Clearinghouse.”
- “Family reunification is the core goal of the child welfare system, and nearly 50 percent of all cases result in reunification; however, the federal investment and infrastructure to help families reunify successfully and prevent them from re-entering foster care is insufficient. We recommend that Congress increase funding in Title IV-B to build on the reunification reforms in Family First by allowing concrete and economic support – which families identify as most critical for their success – for families who have reunified or will be reunified with their children.”

**The American Bar Association** recognizes the need for expanded access to legal representation in child welfare proceedings to achieve the goals of Family First and elevates a recent rule that allows Title IV-E reimbursement for a portion of the costs of legal counsel for parents, children, tribes, and sometimes kin.

- “ACF expressly noted in the final rule that independent legal representation can both “help stabilize families, improve safety, and reduce the need for more formal child welfare system involvement” and ‘expedite reunification and improve permanency or help provide access to needed supports for youth transitioning out of the child welfare system.’”
- “Systems in which children, parents, caregivers, and agencies can more easily access high quality legal representation offer greater protection of legal rights both before and after a child welfare petition has been filed. Additionally, systems that partner to finance independent legal representation are in a fitting position also to examine (or re-examine) how they can partner with the legal community to pursue Family First Act goals.”
- “Given the important timing of this new rule and the renewed emphasis on Family First Act implementation, especially during prevention services, we urge the Senate to encourage child welfare agencies to consider the benefits of drawing down federal funding for independent legal representation for children, parents, tribes, and kin in keeping with the recent rule change.”

**Social Current** describes how the use of flex funds to meet families' concrete needs be identified as an evidence-based practice to help stabilize families and reduce child welfare system involvement and elevates the importance of acknowledging how poverty impacts families and the role of poverty in child welfare involvement. In addition, Social Current identifies the need to move upstream to proactively support families and to engage the broader community and family and child serving systems in the work of supporting families.

- "Based on Chapin Hall's analysis of the relationship between ECS and child maltreatment and child welfare involvement, recognize the importance of providing flexible funds for meeting families' concrete needs as an evidence-based practice that helps stabilize families and reduces child welfare system involvement."
- "Child protective services (CPS) is one component in what should be a shared framework of responsibility and accountability for child and family safety and well-being. Public policies should emphasize prevention of harm and entry into the child welfare system through a public health approach that addresses the social determinants of health (SDoH)."
- **"It is also time to reframe the conversation around child welfare and acknowledge the impact of poverty on families.** We must train those within the system to recognize and connect the dots between aspects of structural racism that are becoming familiar to the public – such as lack of access to quality housing – and the ways those experiences can hamper and impede safe, stable, and nurturing relationships. **Child welfare systems must be incentivized to look deeper into economic challenges that reflect a lack of resources for families rather than simply labeling them as flawed families.**"
- "Ultimately, as we advocate for macroeconomic policies that resource families so that basic needs are met and there is a buffer for weathering economic shocks, such as unemployment, our advocacy must include the creation of a cross-sector shared responsibility and accountability framework that ensures family challenges do not become child safety crises. Looking at the data around the positive impacts of economic support programs on our social service systems, we have both an opportunity and a mandate to realign the way we think about poverty, neglect, and family strengthening policies, and to rebuild our systems to bolster child and family well-being and better support families in need."

**The Children’s Trust Fund Alliance** highlights the perspective of parents and their need to allow states to provide concrete economic supports to families as part of their Family First implementation.

- “We recommend allowing more flexibility for states to provide concrete economic supports as part of their Family First implementation. There is a growing amount of research that shows access to economic supports is the most effective intervention to help prevent the need for foster care more than any other. **In order to realize the promise of Family First, use of Title IV-E prevention funds for economic supports for families should be permitted.**”
- “Our parents call for reforms to narrow the front door of the child welfare system and increased investments in primary prevention programs.”

**Generations United** describes the importance of meeting the ECS needs of grandfamilies and the critical role of kinship navigators in connecting kinship caregivers to necessary support, and recommends investment in approaches that address economic insecurity and material hardship of caregivers.

- “Research indicates that children and youth in grandfamilies who receive services and support, such as financial and legal assistance, housing, food and nutrition supports, health services, and peer-to-peer supports, experience better outcomes than those whose grandfamilies don’t receive services. But many grandfamilies lack access to services to help meet these basic needs, which can lead to greater child welfare system involvement and more children and youth in non-relative foster care ... Reforms to the Family First Prevention Services Act can play an important role in improving supports and services for kinship/grandfamilies, as well as in shaping child welfare policy and services nationwide to better support children, youth, and families.”
- “Kinship Navigator Programs play a critical role in helping connect kinship/grandfamilies to supports and services, such as financial and legal assistance, support groups, and caregiver training, so that the children and youth thrive.”
- “Recognize the critical need to invest in approaches that address economic insecurity and material hardship facing kinship families and provide a framework to address these needs without child welfare involvement, such as the pilot programs supported by the Doris Duke Foundation.”

**Chapin Hall** recognizes the need to include ECS services as an eligible category of service under Family First and for the creation of policies to build further the prevention continuum of Family First, and to implement macro-economic policies to support the concrete and material needs of families

- “Two categories of evidence-based programs or services are needed alongside mental health and substance use prevention and treatment and parent skill building based on what has been learned through substantial research, as well as the Congressional direction setting through the Title IV-E waiver projects and initial implementation of Family First: “engagement, navigation & care coordination services” and “ECS services.”
- “Importantly, as Senate Finance Committee Chairman Senator Wyden noted in his opening comments at the May 22nd hearing, a key component of prevention relates to ECS...There is a need to clarify inclusion of ECS as a Family First evidence-based service category to meet families’ basic needs, buffer against economic shocks, and increase engagement with services.”
- “Chapin Hall has reviewed and synthesized over 40 years of evidence regarding the relationship between financial stability, basic needs, and child welfare system involvement, and the evidence points to both the need and evidence-based rationale for including ECS as an explicit service category in any revision to Family First.”
- “To ensure Family First is effective, it must include services that families say they need and are helpful to them. The Birth Parent National Network of the Children’s Trust Fund Alliance has created a clear description of the policies, programs and services needed, and ECS are central to their framework. ECS prevent child abuse and neglect and reduce the likelihood of foster care entry, as well as provide a stabilizing function so that more clinically oriented evidence-based programs, if needed, can be successful.”
- “The evidence of ECS (e.g., housing, health care, child care, employment supports, tax credits, cash) to prevent child abuse and neglect, investigations and the use of foster care also point to the need to integrate shared responsibility and accountability across the public human services and health platform in revisions to Family First, and in other policies. Health and social services policies external to child welfare have a clear relationship to child abuse and neglect and the use of foster care, yet the related programs and services are rarely administered as if they have an effect on child abuse and neglect.”
- **“A fundamental goal of macro-economic policies and health and human services policies is to create the context in which our nation can be strong, healthy and productive, and to reduce more costly interventions that intrude into family unity and erode human capital.** Orienting our broad policy context to prevent or avert child abuse and neglect, the activation and deployment of child protective services, and the use of foster care is attainable and necessary. “Provide assistance to needy families so that children can remain at home or with relatives” is the first statutory purpose of the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) program, which

could be administered more robustly in alignment of this purpose, and similar language could be integrated in other policies like housing, Medicaid, and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance, for example.”

- “Additionally, the evidence that ECS policies prevent child abuse and neglect and involvement with child welfare points toward the need for policies that build out the prevention continuum beyond Family First to expand and increase access to macro-economic and other policies like child care, child tax credit, health care, paid family leave, and affordable housing. These policies have been shown to be associated with reductions in child maltreatment and child welfare system involvement, and would contribute significantly to preventing the erosion of human capital and the fiscal costs the nation is currently incurring due to maltreatment and involvement with child welfare.”

## CONTACT INFORMATION

[Chapin Hall](#) is an independent policy research center that provides public and private decision-makers with rigorous research and achievable solutions to support them in improving the lives of children, families, and communities. We partner with policymakers, practitioners, and philanthropists to construct actionable information, practical tools, and, ultimately, positive change for families. Chapin Hall's areas of research include child welfare systems, community capacity to support children and families, and youth homelessness. For more information about Chapin Hall, visit [www.chapinhall.org](http://www.chapinhall.org) or [@Chapin\\_Hall](#).

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