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Washington, D.C. - Today, Rep. Doris Matsui (CA-5) voted for the Fostering Connections to Success Act (H.R. 6307), a bipartisan bill that will makes a number of overdue improvements to the child welfare system. The bill is designed to improve connections to services, family, health care, and education for children in foster care and for those who "age out" of the system.

"In light of the investigative reporting at The Sacramento Bee, it is evident that we need increased oversight of our foster care system. The bill we are taking up today will ensure that the federal government is doing its part to make sure that the children who are a part of the foster system are safe and provided for. The foster care administrators and employees must be qualified, trained, and given access to the resources necessary to protect our vulnerable youth," said Rep. Matsui.

The legislation expands coverage of Federal funds for the training of child welfare workers to include private agency and non-profit workers who provide foster care and adoption services on behalf of the State. Increasing access to training for all caseworkers involved in protecting and caring for abused and neglected children is important to determining whether a child can remain safely at home or should be removed.

This bill also for the first time provides Federal financial support for relatives who assume legal guardianship of foster children. Studies show that children placed in subsidized guardianship arrangements are less likely to be placed in foster care for an extended period of time and have fewer behavioral problems compared to children placed in foster care.

"In today's day and age, we know that we all have a stake in each other's health and safety. I can think of no better example of how community engagement is necessary to ensure our collective well-being. When a child who has been entrusted to the state suffers, our system... and each one of us... suffers as well," said Rep. Matsui.

Most young adults in this country are not financially self-supportive at age 18 and rely on their parents for financial help when they are in college or have first moved out into their own home. Foster children deserve no less. The Fostering Connections to Success Act for the first time extends Federal foster care payments up to age 21 (at State option) to provide children who age out of foster care with important financial support while they are pursuing a degree or beginning their working career.

Similarly, adoption assistance payments are extended up to age 21 (also at State option) for children who have been adopted out of foster care after age 16. Researchers have concluded that remaining in foster care past age 18 results in better access to health and mental health care, doubles the likelihood of being in school, and triples the likelihood of being in college. H.R. 6307 further promotes those positive outcomes by for the first time requiring that foster and adoptive youth under age 18 be in high school and that those over age 18 be in school, training, or work to receive continued financial support.

Finally, H.R. 6307 makes other important improvements in the care of foster children, including new oversight and enhancement of children's health care and requirements that children be provided with stable educational environments. The bill also provides tribal governments with direct access to Federal foster care and adoption funding for the first time, requires that States make their best efforts to place siblings together in foster or adoptive homes, and reauthorizes the successful Adoption Incentives Program and expands its bonuses for the adoption of special needs and older children.

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