



June 21, 2016

United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative:

On behalf of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development and Catholic Charities USA, we write in support of H.R. 5456, the Family First Prevention Services Act of 2016.

In his recent Apostolic Exhortation, *Amoris Laetitia*, Pope Francis wrote:

The choice of adoption and foster care expresses a particular kind of fruitfulness in the marriage experience In the light of those situations where a child is desired at any cost, as a right for one's self-fulfilment, adoption and foster care, correctly understood, manifest an important aspect of parenting and the raising of children. They make people aware that children, whether natural, adoptive or taken in foster care, are persons in their own right who need to be accepted, loved and cared for, and not just brought into this world. The best interests of the child should always underlie any decision in adoption and foster care (no. 180).

The Church thus recognizes and values the often heroic witness of those who provide loving foster care to children in need. At the same time, we understand that, where possible, meaningful support for families experiencing serious challenges can be critically important. For some, well-timed assistance can help keep families together, strengthening child outcomes and building toward long-term thriving.

Catholic Charities has extensive experience, both in supporting families with mental health care, substance abuse treatment and parenting skills training, and in providing foster care support. Last year alone over 11,000 children received foster care support and over 1,500 children were adopted from foster care programs through Catholic Charities supported programs.

Given our deep understanding and concern for family and our breadth of experience in helping parents in need, we urge you to pass H.R.5456. Among the commendable provisions are:

- Resources to assist parents with mental health, substance abuse or parenting skill issues to increase opportunities for children to remain in their homes where safe to do so;
- Increased priority for placing children with other family members or in family foster settings;
- Funding for evidence-based services to prevent child abuse and neglect related to substance abuse;
- Additional support for the transition of foster children into adulthood.

As Saint John Paul II remarked, "As the family goes, so goes the nation, and so goes the whole world in which we live" (homily, Perth, Australia, November 30, 1986). The importance of supporting parents, children and families by improving the foster care system is critical for the good of our nation. Please support H.R. 5456.

Sincerely yours,

Most Reverend Thomas G. Wenski
Archbishop of Miami
Chairman, Committee on Domestic Justice
and Human Development

Sr. Donna Markham, OP, Ph.D.
President & CEO
Catholic Charities USA