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May 19, 2008

The Honorable Charles Grassley, Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Finance
United States Senate
219 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Grassley:

The County Welfare Directors Association of California supports the principles outlined in the draft summary of the *Improved Adoption Incentives and Relative Guardianship Support Act of 2008*. While we have not had the opportunity to read the bill's legislative provisions, the concepts envisioned in the Act improve upon the tools necessary to promote permanency options for children in foster care.

Adoption Incentives Program Improvements: California continues to vigorously pursue adoptions, with nearly 7,400 adoptions finalized in federal fiscal year (FFY) 2006. Adoption is one key component in an overall effort by California counties' to reduce the number of children in our custody. The current structure of the federal adoption incentive program has precluded the majority of states from earning additional funds which would then be reinvested in the system. California has not earned incentives since FFY 2001 and CWDA welcomes both updating the baseline year to 2007 and increasing the payments for finalized adoptions. CWDA also supports the measure's prospective de-linking of Title IV-E from 1996 AFDC income standards for special needs adopted children. Such a step recognizes the inequalities locked into the IV-E system overall when the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families program was first enacted.

Title IV-E Relative Guardianship Support: California's counties have partnered with the state to administer and finance the Kinship Guardianship Assistance Payment (Kin-GAP) Program. Created in 2000, the program serves approximately 16,000 families by establishing a permanency option for children under the care of a relative. We are very proud of the program's progress and successful outcomes for Kin-GAP children.

Because of our state and county success, we are encouraged to note that the bill establishes a ground-breaking federal IV-E option for relative guardianship payments. We have been informed, however, that the measure would only provide payments to relatives meeting current IV-E licensing standards, rather than the alternative licensing processes under Kin-GAP. We will work with you and other supporters of relative guardianship to find ways to improve and expand this extremely important provision.

We support the bill's provision to allow unobligated funds from the Adoption Incentive program to be made available to states adopting a relative guardianship program. Additional options for earning and reinvesting funds into activities directed toward permanency further strengthen the ability of counties to serve children in the child welfare system.

Thank you for your leadership in introducing the legislation. We look forward to reviewing the legislative language and providing constructive comments to advance the bill.

If you have questions about our views, please have your staff contact Tom Joseph, Director of CWDA's Washington Office at 202.898.1444 or tj@wafed.com.

Sincerely,

Frank Mecca
Executive Director