

## Promises of Changes Coming by the Administration of Children and Families

Michael Fitzgerald writer for "The Imprint – Youth and Family News," interviewed Alex Adams, Assistant Secretary of the Administration of Children and Families to ask about his aim to improve the ratio of foster homes to youth in foster care, and reforms he championed in Idaho.

The article entitled: "Trump's Top Child Welfare Official Promises 'Bonfire' of Deregulation and a Host of Other Goals" is both interesting, informative and hopeful.



Alex J. Adams, PharmD, MPH, serves as Assistant Secretary for Family Support, leading the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. He was nominated to lead the agency by President Donald J. Trump and was confirmed on October 7, 2025, by a vote of the U.S. Senate.

Assistant Secretary Adams brings years of health, human services, education, and regulatory expertise to advance President Trump and Secretary Kennedy's broader vision to Make American Healthy Again. Prior to leading ACF, Dr. Adams spent more than ten years in Idaho State Government, most notably as Governor Brad Little's budget and regulatory director and state Department of Health & Welfare director. In these capacities, he oversaw the state's first upgrade to a AAA credit rating with both Fitch Ratings and Moody's. Dr. Adams led the Governor's zero-based regulation initiative, which resulted in Idaho becoming the least regulated state in the nation. He also made significant efforts to improve Idaho's child welfare system, enacting kin-specific licensing standards, announcing paid family leave for foster parents, extending foster care to age 23, and overseeing record recruitment and retention of foster homes.

Dr. Adams earned his bachelor's degree and Doctor of Pharmacy degree from the University of Toledo in Ohio and his Master of Public Health degree from Johns Hopkins University Bloomberg School of Public Health in Baltimore. Dr. Adams and his wife, Jennifer, are raising their daughter, Emerson.

Since The Imprint is available only through a paid subscription, I cannot cut and past the article to share with you. Based on the title of the article, Dr. Adams plans to do away with the red tape. He plans to torch significant portions of the Administration for

Children and Families' 43,000 pages of "sub-regulations" that govern much of the nation's safety net for families.

I can share with you Dr. Adam's December 11, 2025 notification published by the U.S. Department of Health and Human services:

### **ACF Notifies 39 Governors That States Are Diverting Foster Youths' Earned Social Security Survivor Benefits**

The Administration for Children and Families (ACF) at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) today sent letters to 39 governors calling for immediate action to protect vulnerable foster youth in their states. These letters highlight the pressing issue of state child welfare agencies diverting foster youths' earned Social Security survivor benefits.

State child welfare agencies often intercept federal benefits, such as Social Security survivor benefits earned through a deceased parent's lifetime contributions, that are intended for a child in foster care. Agencies then use these funds to reimburse their own costs. ACF has notified all 39 governors who allow this practice and aims to work with states to end it. The goal is to ensure these earned benefits are no longer taken from foster youth and are instead preserved to support them as they transition out of state care.

"At HHS, our guiding principle is simple: every child deserves a home and a fair chance to thrive. But when state agencies stack the deck against children, we step in," **said HHS Secretary Robert F. Kennedy, Jr.** "In the Trump Administration, we are committed to ensuring every child in America has the chance to reach their full potential."

"Every earned benefit dollar belongs to these foster youth, not the government agencies or bureaucrats," **said ACF Assistant Secretary Alex J. Adams.** "Protecting children is the core mission of child welfare, and we will keep the best interests of the child front and center in all our efforts."

During Assistant Secretary Adams' tenure leading Idaho's Department of Health and Welfare, he ended the practice of the state diverting these earned benefits from foster youth. Idaho now requires that survivor benefits be used for the genuine unmet needs of the child and preserves the remaining balance for the child's future use.

Scott Matlock — an Idaho native and current NFL fullback for the Los Angeles Chargers — entered Idaho's foster care system at thirteen after the deaths of both his parents. Before Assistant Secretary Adams led widespread reforms, Matlock never received his parent's survivor benefits.

"I commend President Trump, Secretary Kennedy, and Assistant Secretary Adams for taking decisive action to encourage states to protect children and ensure foster youth have a strong financial foundation," **said Scott Matlock, current NFL player and former foster youth.** "My

hope is the next kid coming through foster care gets every penny he or she deserves, no matter what state they live in.”

To date, only 11 states have enacted policies to stop the interception of Social Security survivor benefits and conserve them for the child's unmet needs. ACF and the Social Security Administration plan to provide resources, in addition to existing technical assistance, to help the remaining 39 states change this practice.

<https://www.hhs.gov/press-room/states-are-diverting-earned-social-security.html>

In his interview with Michael Fitzgerald – Imprint News, Adams said: “He will prioritize preventing the need to use foster care. For children who are removed from home, he aims to boost the availability of foster homes and placements with relative caregivers. Adams praised President Trump and First Lady Melania Trump, who he joined for a recent publicity event at the White House announcing initiatives to support older foster youth, expand partnerships with faith-based organizations and modernize the child welfare system's technology.”

Reading between the lines, I predict that there will be a significant reset on governmental red tape, rules and regulations that came our way under the past Presidential administration.



### The Changing Face of Child Welfare

As an old child welfare worker, I've been surprised to learn some of the more recent changes that have taken place in Texas to tightened reasons for which children can be removed from their families following allegations of abuse or neglect. I suspect other states are similarly making changes.

My granddaughter graduated from Sam Houston State University this past May with a degree in criminal justice. During her last semester, she did an internship in a battered women's shelter and subsequently upon graduation sought employment as a child abuse investigator with the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services.

Frankly, I was pleased that she opted to go that route rather than pursue employment in an environment where a loaded gun is part of the dress code.

For several months now, she has telephoned on a weekly basis to provide me an update on her job satisfaction and some of the challenges associated to the work. Based on our communication, **I've gleaned that child welfare today is very different from the past.**

For example, standards related to neglect have changed from demonstrating to the court **“substantial risk of harm”** as a basis for a child being temporarily removed to having to substantiate to the court that the child is in **“immediate danger.”**

The approach has become more like a law enforcement agency where parents are provided more rights (like Miranda warnings) before they are required to answer questions. They have the right to request the presence of an attorney before doing so.

**During the past Legislative session in Texas, legislation was introduced which strongly resembled the Child Welfare Indian Act. Texas House Bill 2216 (HB 2216), introduced during the 89th Legislative Session in 2025, was referred to as the "ICWA for all" bill.**

I share this with you because reportedly in many states similar legislation is being considered and has been passed.

Its primary goal of ICWA-like bill was to provide all Texas families with the same heightened legal protections and due process standards currently afforded to Native American families under the federal Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA).

The main objectives of the bill included:

- **Raising the Burden of Proof:** It sought to raise the evidentiary standard required for the Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) to remove a child or terminate parental rights from "clear and convincing evidence" to "beyond a reasonable doubt".
- **Requiring "Active Efforts":** The bill would have required DFPS to demonstrate "active efforts" to keep families together or reunite them, a more rigorous standard than the current requirement of "reasonable efforts".
- **Defining Evidentiary Standards:** It explicitly stated that factors such as poverty, inadequate housing, single-parent households, or parental substance use alone would not constitute sufficient grounds for removing a child.
- **Prioritizing Family Placement:** It aimed to strengthen the preference for placing children with relatives or designated caregivers before considering foster care.
- **Expanding Right to Counsel:** The bill intended to eliminate the requirement that a parent be in opposition to a suit to receive a court-ordered attorney, thereby expanding access to legal representation for all parents in child welfare cases.

While HB 2216 passed the House, it was left pending in a Senate committee and did not become law.

From what I have been able to determine, no states have laws identical to the federal Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) for all children. Reportedly several states have passed their own ICWA-like laws or expanded on federal ICWA, applying its principles of keeping children connected to family/culture (like tribal heritage) to their own state systems, including Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Nebraska, Oklahoma, Washington, California, New Mexico, Montana, and Wisconsin, often emphasizing cultural ties, though these are generally for Native children but sometimes suggest broader cultural connection mandates.

## **Key States with Stronger State ICWA Laws:**

- **Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Nebraska, Oklahoma, Washington:** Have implemented state ICWA laws that expand federal ICWA, ensuring Indian children stay with or return to their cultural environments.
- **California, New Mexico, Wisconsin:** Also have laws that codify and strengthen ICWA protections, adding clarity and filling gaps.
- **Montana:** Passed the Montana Indian Child Welfare Act (MICWA), modeled after ICWA, focusing on keeping Native children connected to their tribes and cultures.

## **How These Laws Are Similar (But Not Identical):**

- Placement Preferences: Like ICWA, these state laws prioritize keeping children with extended family or within their cultural community (tribal or otherwise).
- Cultural Preservation: They focus on maintaining a child's connection to their heritage, which for Native children means their tribe, but the principle can extend to other cultural groups in some interpretations.
- Tribal Collaboration: They often mandate better coordination between state agencies and tribes.

## **Why They Aren't "For All Children":**

- The core of ICWA and these state versions is specifically to protect the unique status of Native American children and tribal sovereignty over those children.
- While the spirit of keeping children connected to their culture is a goal, these laws don't typically override ICWA's specific application to tribal members but rather strengthen it or apply similar reasoning to other specific cultural groups within their state's context.

## **Rights afforded an alleged perpetrator, a parent, a legal guardian or another person who is subject to an investigation:**

If you are an alleged perpetrator, a parent, a legal guardian, or another person who is the subject of the investigation, and you are being interviewed in a child abuse or neglect investigation, you have the right to:

- Not speak with any agent of DFPS without legal counsel present.
- Know the complaints or allegations in the report.
- Obtain and receive assistance from an attorney at your own expense.
- Have a court-appointed attorney if you are an indigent parent and DFPS files a suit to remove your child or a suit for required participation in services.

- Have legal counsel present before allowing the investigator to enter the home or interview the child.
- Refuse to allow the investigator to enter the home or interview the child without a court order.
- Audio or video record the interview for your own record. Any audio or video recording you make may be subject to disclosure to DFPS, law enforcement, or another party through a subpoena under a court order. By law, audio or video recordings of the interview must not be posted to any website in a manner that could identify someone involved in the interview.
- Receive a copy of DFPS's recording policy (CPS Handbook, 2248.3 Recording Interviews of an Adult).
- Withhold consent to the release of any medical or mental health records.
- Withhold consent to any medical or psychological examination of the child.
- Refuse to submit to a drug test.
- Consult with legal counsel before agreeing to any proposed voluntary safety plan.

At the conclusion of the investigation, if DFPS makes a finding that you have abused or neglected a child, you can request an administrative review of investigative findings under Texas Family Code §261.309. Any statement or admission made by you to anyone may be used against you:

- In a criminal case.
- As a basis to remove the child who is the subject of the investigation or any other child from your care, custody, and control either temporarily or permanently.
- As a basis to terminate your relationship with the child who is the subject of the investigation or any other child in your care, custody, and control.

## **GOOD NEWS   GOOD NEWS   GOOD NEWS   GOOD NEWS   GOOD NEWS**

The **2026 CORE NATIONAL CONFERENCE** will be hosted by Florida Sheriffs Youth Ranches. While it is anticipated to take place in early October, a specific date has not yet been determined.

### **MARCH 17, 2026 - SAVE The DATE and Plan to ATTEND Advocacy Day on Capitol Hill**

It is our plan to arrive in Washington, D.C., on March 16th and meet late afternoon or meet for dinner that evening. It is our hope to convene on the House Floor as a first order of business on the morning of March 17th. The location is of great importance to stir our imaginations and remind us of what historically has held the promise of hope for issues that needed to be enacted

in legislation. For too long now, the status quo of the lack of appropriate foster homes to meet the needs of children who imminently are at risk has been overlooked by those in the Nation's Capitol. H.R. 4972 - Create Accountable Respectful Environments (CARE) for Child Act is aimed at increasing capacity, keeping sibling groups together, and providing a normalized home and community environment with opportunities for age-appropriate extracurricular, enrichment, cultural, and social activities and the same freedoms afforded peers living with families. The Act also provides a system of checks and balances to ensure a child's ongoing safety and wellbeing in a cottage family home and makes such a child's placement eligible for foster care maintenance payments. It is of great importance that you soon reach out to your Representatives in Congress to schedule a meeting regarding the need to support H.R. 4972 when you attend Advocacy Day on Capitol Hill on March 17, 2025. Several members of CORE's legislative committee will be present for Advocacy Day and are available to accompany anyone to their scheduled appointment. Together we can do this. Together we must do this. The time is now! Link for the Act: <https://steube.house.gov/press-releases/rep-steube-leadsbipartisan-effort-to-expand-housing-for-foster-children/>

## **CORE Needs Your Help with Accomplishing the Strategic Plan for 2026 - 2029**

### **CORE Committee Sign-Up Form – Fill out form**

Committees include: Legislation, Finance, Communication & Education/Conference

Together We Strengthen and Enrich the Coalition of Residential Excellence - Honestly, We Cannot Do It Without you.

### **Welcome New Member**

Masonic Home at Oxford began as Oxford Orphanage in 1873. It was established by Masons. The 400 acre campus at one time served 200 to 300 children. In today's environment, the home now serves 60 children. The campus is very impressive and the buildings from "yester-year" continue to be utilized in a number of ways.



Following a nation-wide search for a new President, Christopher Allabaugh who previously worked for North Carolina Baptist Children's Home was selected for the position.

The town and neighborhood surrounding the home reflect the best of the best. High-end Victorian homes comprise that part of Oxford. Residents of Oxford are supportive of the children's home's presence and provide their support. There are two medical mental health professionals with offices on the campus. Consequently, residents in care needing that kind of support are immediately placed at the top of the list.



Additionally, six non-profit agencies in the Oxford community have offices on the campus. Several of the two-story cottages are used for older residents for independent living.

Following graduation from high school, the agency provides collage scholarships or vocational program opportunities. Residents can stay following graduation from high school while they transition to independence.

The agency owns and operates a printing business with six-full time employees who provide printing services for the community as well as in-house printing service. Older resident's with an interest in printing are afforded internships. The building previously used as a cafeteria prior to meals being served in the cottages, has been converted to a culinary school, and resident's interested in culinary arts are also able to have an internship.

Students wanting part-time after school work, are also provided opportunities in the community. The children's home has a church on campus and children attend church on campus on Sundays. On Wednesday nights, cottages generally attend churches in the community that have robust programs for youth.

School age children attend public school in Oxford. School related extra-curricula activities are encouraged by the home. There is also a state-of-the-art gymnasium on campus and a robust recreational program.

In 2005, seven single-story, eight-bedroom, homes were built. That provides children the opportunity to have a private bedroom. A bath is shared by two residents. Children in care have opportunities to visit with family members on campus twice a week. In addition, telephone contact can be made as often as the family or child desires.

Seventy percent of the children in care are private placements. Referrals are made by schools, churches and other agencies across North Carolina. The other 30% are placed by the North Carolina Department of Social Services (DSS).

The children's home embraces best practices. They were recently re-accredited by COA. No deficiencies were noted.

For the past five years, the agency has employed the CARE program by Cornell University. The have found this evidenced based trauma informed program a great support for children.

The home has an annual home-coming for alumnus that is routinely attended by 4,000 people. They are not all alumnus, but also include folks from the community supportive of the children's home.

