

# CORE

COALITION OF RESIDENTIAL EXCELLENCE

## Executive Director's Report March 2026



The Scottish poet Robert Burns wrote: “The best-laid plans of mice and men often go awry.” Unexpectedly, a severe winter storm during what had been spring-like weather was responsible for multiple cancelled flights. The abrupt cold played havoc with CORE’s Legislative Fly-In scheduled for March 17, 2026.

Maria Knapp, Chair of CORE’s legislative committee and two of her colleagues from Florida Sheriffs Youth Ranches could not get out of Florida due to their flight cancellation on March 16<sup>th</sup>. Flights were also unavailable for the following day.

Yet the importance of time on Capitol Hill was of such priority, that if air travel was available, those who had planned to be in attendance didn’t let unseasonably cold temperatures quell their resolve to make contacts with legislators on Capitol Hill. As it turned out, it proved to be more of a “catch-as-catch-can” juggling of schedules because many legislators could not get back to DC on March 16<sup>th</sup> due to flight cancellations. Consequently, morning appointments had to be re-scheduled for later in the afternoon. Overall, it worked out well.

The following members of CORE’s Legislative Committee were in attendance: Gregg Harper – Lobbyist, Sean Milner – Baptist Children’s Village and Family Ministries, Christopher Allabaugh – Masonic Home at Oxford, Dr. Chad Parker – Tupelo Children’s Mansion, James Turner – Milton Hershey School, and Don Forrester – Coalition of Residential Excellence.

Others participating include Ron Matis and Greg Wilhelm from Tupelo Children’s Mansion, Stewart Edwards, Jr. and Carrie Browning from French Camp Academy. In addition, they also brought Dabney Cunningham and Olivia Browning to provide them an overview of the Capitol and an opportunity to observe. Others participating included Jonathan Smith, Kayla Sanders and Lathan Smith from Lighthouse Ranch for Boys.

We gathered on Capitol Hill to advocate for passage of H.R. 4972 – Create Accountable Respectful Environments for Children Act. Passage of this Act is critically important in restoring children’s homes back into the continuum of care available for children who are in conservatorship of public children’s protective service agencies. At present, there is a shortage of available appropriate foster homes for children at risk of imminent harm.

The priority of a child protective service investigator is to leave children in their own homes when abuse/neglect is confirmed if possible, with a safety plan developed to keep them safe. A second option is kinship care. The reality is that despite these two options, there are not enough resources for children who cannot be kept safe in their own homes or in kinship care.

H.R. 4972 was filed August 15, 2025, by Rep. Greg Steube from Florida. The Act is identical to the bill that was filed by Rep. Neal Dunn in the 118th Legislative Session. The current bill has 22 cosponsors [16 from Florida, 3 from Mississippi, 1 from Texas, 1 from Virginia, and 1 from Tennessee]

During the previous Legislative Session, a companion bill was never filed in the Senate because the Republican senator willing to file the bill insisted it must be filed as a bipartisan legislation. A Democratic senator willing to cosponsor the legislation was never located.

To date, a companion bill to H.R. 4972 has not been filed in the Senate this legislative session for the same reason. While on The Hill for the Legislative Summit, our lobbyist along with another person or two visited with administrative staff of a Democratic senator in an effort to securing the senator’s commitment to cosponsor this legislation. Reportedly, legislative staff asked good questions and seemed to have a level of interest in the legislation. The contact seemed hopeful.

Contact was also made with Sen. Cruz from Texas to ask that he cosponsor the legislation once it is filed in the Senate. A senator from Florida has already committed to filing the legislation once a Democratic senator can be located to cosponsor the Bill.

**Please allow me to refresh your memory concerning the legislation.** H.R. 4972 – Create Accountable



Respectful Environments for Children Act is aimed at increasing capacity, keeping sibling groups together, and providing children 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 adds “cottage family homes” to the continuum of care for which Title IV-E funding can be used. The term “cottage family home” means a family-like home operated by a public or private child-care agency licensed or approved by the state where it is located. Cottage family homes offer a family like environment in a single-family style residence with no more than two children per bedroom unless it is in the best interest of children; and one in which children are the care of live-in cottage parents that implement the reasonable and prudent standard and provide 24-hour substitute care for children placed away from their parents are placed from their parents or caretakers.

**The cottage family home model:**

- Provides children with full time cottage parents available for supervision and nurturing around the clock. Enables siblings to stay together.
- Provides a myriad of checks and balances to ensure the child’s safety.
- Creates a layer of support for the parents of children in care. Instead of attempting to replace parents of children, agencies work with parents and their children to resolve difficulties with the goal of reunification.
- Guarantees that staff receive extensive training and use a systemic approach in providing trauma-informed care. The health, safety, and well-being of children is critically important.

**To maintain a high standard of care, this Act offers the following stipulations:**

- Requiring the implementation of a trauma-informed approach to care.
- Prohibiting the use of seclusion, mechanical or chemical restraints.
- Allowing the use of short-term physical restraint if approved in the agency’s policies to prevent injury to self or others and the prohibition of prone physical restraint.
- Requiring providers to have a system in place to alert a staff person if they have concerns or feel they have unfairly been denied their rights or are subject to the threat of mistreatment.

- Requiring a continuous quality improvement methodology that regularly solicits information from children concerning their perceptions of the quality of care and identification of strengths and weaknesses of the program.

The Act is intended to address or assist in resolving the shortage of appropriate foster homes for children. It provides a system of checks and balances to ensure a child's on-going safety and wellbeing in a cottage family home and makes such a child's placement eligible for foster care maintenance payments.

## **The Capitol Tour**

In addition to having an opportunity to make meaningful contacts on Capitol Hill, we were privileged for an early morning tour of the U.S. Capitol provided by former Congressman Gregg Harper. He knows the history and layout of the Capitol like the back of his hand. He is the quintessential seasoned tour guide with a red jacket. There is something awe inspiring to have the privilege to meet inside the House Chamber where Presidents and Congressmen have walked and stood, where State of the Union addresses have been made annually. In addition, while seated in the House Chamber we learned history from Greg Harper that one would not think possible.

Mid-afternoon on March 1, 1954, four Puerto Rican nationalist armed with concealed handguns casually walked into the gallery of the House Chamber and took seats. That was long before Capitol Guards, x-ray security systems, or protective security protocols were in place like they are today. The would be assassins unfurled the Puerto flag over the balcony railing while shouting, "Viva Puerto Rico libre!"—"Long live free Puerto Rico!" They opened fire on members of Congress. Five members of Congress were injured, one seriously.



One of the highlights of having former Congressman Harper on our team is that he arranged for us to have lunch in the Senate Dining room.

Interestingly United States Senate Bean Soup or simply Senate bean soup is a soup made with navy beans, ham hocks, and onion.

It is served in the dining room of the United States Senate every day, in a tradition that dates back to the early 20th century. The original version included celery, garlic, and parsley.

### **CORE Finance Committee**

The first CORE Finance Committee meeting took place on March 3, 2026. There are eight people on the committee and a couple indicated the date was not good for them, but the meeting took place as scheduled. Jennifer Renner-Meyer, CORE Board Treasurer is head of the committee.

We actually didn't have any pressing business, but wanted to meet to garner ideas regarding making the most of funds. For example, our CORE bank account generates no interest from funds in the account. Currently our only two sources of income are from CORE membership dues and conference registration fees.

Since there were only three committee members in attendance for the March 3rd meeting, we plan to do a better job of coordinating the meeting time for the next Finance Committee meeting.

### **CORE Communication Committee**

The Core Communication Committee is scheduled to meet on April 8th. This will be the second committee meeting. Following the first meeting in February, I subsequently met via Zoom with Daryl Thuringer, Chair for the CORE Communication Committee on March 5, 2026. We discussed the importance of conducting a social media audit. I also answered Daryl's questions concerning CORE's use of social media in the past.

Daryl Thuringer serves as the Communication Director for St. Joseph's Indian School and is very knowledgeable in branding, marketing, advertising and communications. The meeting scheduled for 1:00 p.m. CST/2:00 p.m. EDT is an important meeting as we continue to get to know one another as committee members and settle on determine priorities for what we need to accomplish.

I previously sent a link to the Communication Committee members for the April 3, meeting, but will refresh that link closer to April 8.

## **CORE Conference/Education Committee**

The CORE Conference/Education Committee met on March 3, 2026. Discussion centered around location, agenda and other plans for the conference. We reviewed feedback received by Methodist Children's Home from evaluations gathered at the 2025 CORE National Conference.

Plans are in place for RFPs for workshop presentations and Nomination Forms for Catherine Hershey Awards to go out within the next few days.



### **Update on other Pending Legislation associated with Fostering The Future of American Children and Facilities - Executive Order made by President Trump.**

#### **• H. R. 6221 - Fostering the Future for American Children and Families Act**

The bill was introduced on November 20, 2025, by Rep. Zachary Dunn. On that date, the Bill was referred to both the Committee on Education and Workforce and to the Committee on Ways as Means, for a period to be determined by the Speaker, in each case for consideration of such provisions as fall within the jurisdiction of the committees concerned.

There were three initial cosponsors. Subsequently another Representative signed on in December 2025 and one in February 2026. There has been no activity noted since February.

The Act has the purpose of improving career, technical job training, and apprenticeship opportunities for current and former foster youth. Additionally it expands the use of education and training vouchers for short term programs and authorizes \$50 million in annual funding.

- **H.R. 7259 - Fresh Starts for Foster Youth Act**

The legislation was introduced by Rep. Danny Davis [D-IL-7] on 02/12/2026. This legislation focuses on legal support by requiring states to consider legal issues (housing, education, employment) in case planning and allows use of Chafee Foster Care Program funds for legal services and counseling. The bill has one cosponsor.

There was no activity on this legislation during the month of March 2026 .

- **H.R. 7419 - Foster Care Stabilization Act of 2026**

Last month I reported The bill was filed by Rep Don Bacon [R-NE-2] with Rep. Gwen Moore [D-Wi-4], Rep. Zachary Nunn [R-IA-3], and Rep. Mary Scanion [D-PA-5] on February 9, 2026 .

The legislation has been signed on by Rep. Jason Smith [R-MO-8], Chair of the Ways and Means Committee and by Rep. Richard Neal [D-MA-1] Ranking Member of the Ways and Means Committee. In addition, 43 other members of the Ways and Means Committee have signed on in support of the legislation. In addition, 8 other Representatives have signed on in support.

This bill aims to amend Title IV of the Social Security Act to establish a demonstration grant program for emergency relief to improve pre-placement services.

The aforementioned narrative was gleaned from the [CONGRESS.GOV](https://www.congress.gov) website.

The narrative related to the bill on this same website on March 30, 2026 makes no reference to the aforementioned second paragraph. From what I can ascertain, there has been no activity in March 2026.

- **S. Res. 516**

The Senate Resolution was introduced Nov 2025/Feb 2026. This is a Senate resolution focusing on ensuring a child-centered, compassionate system that provides adequate support for youth aging out of foster care.

There appears that no action was taken in March.